

The Ramakrishna Mission
Institute of Culture Library

Presented by

Sri Gopal Gordon Stawig

RENTAL BOOK STORE
13 E. COLORADO BLVD.
MADENA, CA 95758

207455



THE LIFE
OF THE
SWAMI VIVEKANANDA.



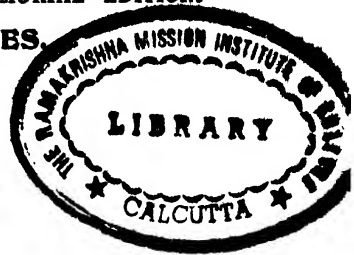
Himalayan Series.—No. XXIII.

THE LIFE OF THE SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

BY
HIS EASTERN AND WESTERN DISCIPLES,
THE ADVAITA ASHRAMA, HIMALAYAS.

THE SEMI-CENTENARY BIRTHDAY MEMORIAL EDITION.
IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



PUBLISHED BY THE SWAMI VIRAJANANDA FROM THE
PRABUDDHA BHARATA OFFICE, ADVAITA ASHRAMA,
MAYAVATI, ALMORA, HIMALAYAS.

1912.

[All Rights Reserved.]

Price, cloth, each Vol. Rs. 3-4 As. Foreign, \$1 ¼, or 6 Shillings.
3 Vols. Full-Morocco, Rs. 22, or \$8, or 24 s. Half-Morocco, Rs. 16, or \$6, or 24 s.

RARE BOOK

PRINTED BY K. C. GHOSH
at The Lakshmi Printing Works,
64-1, Sukea's Street, CALCUTTA.

COPYRIGHT REGISTERED UNDER ACT XX OF 1847.

R M I C LIBRARY	
Acc. No. 207452	
Class No.	291.64 VIN
Date	31.12.2002
St.	SB
Class.	✓
Cat.	✓
Bk. Card	SB
Checked	SB

All rights of translation and reproduction are strictly reserved by the Swami Virajananda, President, Advaita Ashrama. Permission for translation will be granted on certain terms. For particulars enquiries have to be made to him.

DEDICATED TO

BHAGAVAN SRI RAMAKRISHNA,
SRIMAT SWAMI VIVEKANANDA,
THE DISCIPLES OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA,
THE DISCIPLES OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA,
ALL LOVERS OF TRUTH,
AND TO
INDIA AND THE WORLD.

OM BRAHMARPANAMASTU!

Table of Contents.

	PAGE
Preface	xi
Introduction	xvii
I. Even with the Generation Ancestral ...	1
II. The Triumph of Renunciation ...	8
III. The House and Home of the Lordly Duttas.	
A Princely Father ...	14
IV. The Dream of Bhuvaneswari Mâtâ ...	21
V. The Birth and Name of the Master ...	
VI. The Period of Childhood ...	34
VII. The Choice of Gods ...	40
VIII. In the Deepes of Meditation ...	46
IX. The Vision of the Luminous Figure ...	53
X. Dedicated to Saraswati ...	59
XI. Play Days : An Accident ...	65
XII. Some Characteristics : A Prophecy ...	71
XIII. Other Days and an Hour of Trial ...	79
XIV. Parental Guidance—A Mother... ..	86
XV. Further Glimpses of Boyhood... ..	93
XVI. Collegiate Days	102
XVII. The Drift of Tendency : A Death ...	111
XVIII. Struggles and Hardships	117
XIX. The Transitional Period	124
XX. The Wonder of the Lord's Song	132
XXI. The Vision of the Exalted Life... ..	139
XXII. The Dawn of the Intellectual Life ...	147
XXIII. The Tempest of Thought	155
XXIV. In Various Moods	164
XXV. A Fellow-Student's Reminiscences ...	172
XXVI. The Man in the Making	178
XXVII. The Coming of the Light	187
XXVIII. The Brahmo Samaj	197
XXIX. "Mahâsaya, Have You Seen God ?" ...	208
XXX. Ideals in Hinduism	216

	PAGE.
XXXI. The Mystical Consciousness...	... 227
XXXII. Ramakrishna—Kali—Brahman	... 239
XXXIII. The Dakshineswar Kali-Barhi	... 248
XXXIV. At the Touch of the Master ...	... 254
XXXV. The Disciple's Meditation ...	... 264
XXXVI. As Others Saw the Master ...	... 272
XXXVII. The Son of His Mother ...	... 282
XXXVIII. Guru and Disciple ...	... 289
XXXIX. The Monastic Consciousness :	
Renunciation—Purity ...	... 297
XL. Days of Ecstasy at Dakshineswar	... 304
XLI. The Method of the Master's Teaching	... 311
XLII. Initiation into Advaita Vedanta	... 319
XLIII. On the Loom of Discipleship	... 328
XLIV. In the Weaving of the Web ...	... 340
XLV. Glimpses of Personality ...	... 346
XLVI. As the Master Saw Norendra	... 355
XLVII. The Greatness of the Master...	... 363
XLVIII. Towards the Goal ...	... 371
XLIX. The Great Understanding ...	... 378
L. In the Group of Disciples ...	... 385
LI. In the Garden-House at Cossipur	... 393
LII. At Buddha-Gaya and Ghazipur	... 400
LIII. In the Nirvikalpa Samādhi ...	... 408
LIV. Nirvâna ...	... 423

PREFACE.

It is now ten years since the Swami Vivekananda entered **FINAL ILLUMINATION**; it is fifty years since his personality was ushered upon earth. It is therefore befitting that these events should be conterminous with and celebrated by the publishing of the life he lived. For years it has been the desire of the Eastern and Western disciples at the Advaita Ashrama to publish an authoritative biography of their teacher so as to present to the world at large and to posterity the vision, the ideas, the work and the greatness of that personality which the Swami's life embodied.

In the beginning it was planned to incorporate a biographical sketch in the last volume of the Mayavati Memorial Edition of "The Complete Works of the Swami Vivekananda"; but both by reason of the supreme import of the Swami's life to the world and the vast collection of biographical facts of the most interesting nature and of far-reaching significance, gathered during the last seven years, this idea was abandoned. Instead, the life is now presented in three separate volumes.

Much has been written in this work in the way of interpretation, for many of the facts in the Swami's life, without explanation of the Hindu religious and social ideals and without some reference to the psychology of the mystical consciousness, would be likely to confuse the casual reader and might even seem improbable. The world knows the Swami as a giant intellect, a great scholar and orator, a patriotic Hindu and a powerful preacher of the Vedanta. But that is knowing only one phase of this many-sided genius. Even to those who knew him personally, the Swami, both as a lad and as a man, was too complex a character to be readily understood. He was a man of original thoughts and numerous moods, each a world in itself, and when any single one of them came upon him he was so intense that for the time being he would identify himself solely with that particular state of mind above

all others. Thus it happened that many persons saw him from widely varying angles and spoke of him chiefly in the sense in which they personally understood him. This accounts for the many differing presentations of the Swami. Efforts have been made in this work to present the Swami in all his moods and varied illumination so as to reveal the man *as he was*.

Great pains have been taken to authenticate all the private and public sources of information in connection with the biographical facts, and much discretion has been exercised in embodying these, so as to offer to the public a complete and reliable work. An excellent advantage was that most of those who knew the Swami intimately are still alive. There are many disciples, both of the Swami himself and of his spiritual Master, Sri Ramakrishna, whose reminiscences by means of talks and writings, and whose private diaries and published works have given every opportunity for ascertaining the accuracy of statements. Then there are the numerous letters and writings, published and unpublished, of the Swami himself from which to verify the character and the development of his mind and his entire personality. We heartily acknowledge our indebtedness to all these valuable authorities and sources of information, too numerous to mention individually here. Everything in the way of illuminating anecdote and interpretation has been included, and all accounts have been diligently studied so as to keep within the bounds of legitimate biographical treatment.

In order to facilitate the reading and to render the treatment of the lengthy history of the life easier of approach, it has been presented in a series of short chapters under descriptive headings. The attempt throughout has been to portray the elements of life, character, growth and work in as simple and direct a manner as possible and to picture, in particular, the conditions under which the Swami's life was developed and expressed. This necessitated an exposition of the ideas and activities of the Modern Transition in India, and a comprehensive sketch of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna.

who is regarded as the unique spiritual character of Modern India ; it necessitated also the recital of the Modern Religious Transition in the West, because of the Swami's multifarious work there, and also the rise and development of the monastic order of which he was the moving spirit, and of the great philanthropic organisation, known as the Ramakrishna Mission, which he founded.

The first volume presents the narrative of his personality until his twenty-fourth year and the training he underwent at the Feet of his Master for the attainment of spiritual insight and realisation. It takes into account the theme around which the Swami's life is drawn,—the theme of Hinduism, its setting, its basis and its structure. It reveals the growth of a gigantic mind through modern agnosticism into complete saintship. It presents the character of the Swami's Master in the light in which the Swami himself understood him. The reader will become familiar with the Swami in the first volume as "Noren", or "Norendra", the name by which he was known both to the Master and to his brother-disciples and friends, as his proper name was Norendra Nath Dutta. The first volume shows how Noren, having become de-Hinduised became re-Hinduised through his perception of the Synthesis of Hinduism as lived and realised by his Master. For the sake of a clear understanding of the process by which this was effected, several chapters of the first volume are devoted to the elucidation of the Hindu religious and philosophic consciousness. One sees in the first volume the man, the saint, and the prophet in the making.

The second volume deals with the narrative of the Swami's life as the wandering monk, and later on as the bearer of the message of Hinduism to the West. It takes the reader through the scenes of the Swami's life of intense austerities and *sadhana*s in the Baranagore Math, of his travels and silent preaching throughout the length and breadth of Hindusthan, prior to his departure for America, and of his triumphant public career as the apostle of Vedantism during his sojourn in the West. It shows how at the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago, in

1893, the Swami became a world-wide figure and the Prophet of Hinduism. And it dwells on the momentous significance of his ideas and of his work as the spiritual teacher.

The third volume speaks of the Swami's attempts at re-modelling the Indian thought-world, of his re-stating the entire contents of the Sanâtana Dharma and the ancient Aryan culture, and of his bringing about a wave of religious revival in India. It reveals him as the founder of monasteries and centres of public service, as the Man of Sorrows, whose heart bled for the millions of India's poor and distressed, and also as the Man of Joys, thundering at all times, in the hearing of his co-religionists the glories of Hinduism and the bright future of his race. It records his activities during his second visit to the West, and gives a vivid picture of his subsequent life in India. Finally, it speaks of the Swami's influence on Indian life, and of his message and mission as a whole ; and, also, it speaks of the end.

The publishers are well aware that this great life has been lived too recently for the public to gauge fully the import and the possibilities it represents ; they know that many of the statements and interpretations concerning the Swami recorded in this work, may not meet with universal acceptance ; but they are firmly convinced that time will substantiate their value. It matters not in what light the present generation, by reading this life, may regard the Swami, be it as a teacher, patriot, prophet, or saint ; it matters not whether they accept his teachings and his ideas only partially or in their entirety, but all will have to admit that in his life there was made manifest a tremendous force for the moral and spiritual welfare and uplifting of humanity, irrespective of caste, creed, nationality or time, and that as such it commends itself for careful study and reflection.

Those who have produced this work are the Swami's outspoken followers ; nay more than that, they are his disciples and co-workers, representing as they do the Brotherhood of the Advaita Ashrama founded by the Swami himself. They have made every endeavour to give a true and comprehensive:

revelation of their Master. They fully realise that theirs is an enormous undertaking and responsibility. They realise, also, how difficult it is to bring the *man* into the narrow compass of a biography. This is true of every great life, but it is particularly true of the Swami Vivekananda. The limitations of biographical treatment and description have been constantly before them. On the other hand, even the telling of this life is sufficiently inspiring, as of itself it affords a *Revelation*. They earnestly believe that the more the life and teachings of the Swami are made known the more will the spiritual perspective of humanity be widened, and the more will the Hindus take up the methods set forth by him for the reorganisation of their Dharma in consonance with modern needs and modern problems. They therefore make no apologies as to their understanding of him or for the method in which they have presented him. They have been actuated by the spirit of discipleship. In sending out this work into the world, they are guided by the hope that many a seeker after Truth, having a deeper knowledge of this great life, may be helped to solve the problem of existence, and having an entrée into a world of richer spiritual insight may be inspired to follow his example to travel upon that Path of Righteousness which the Swami pointed out, in the words of the Vedas, to be—*Atmano Mokshartham jagaddhityacha*—"for the Salvation of one's own soul and for the good of the World".

THE EASTERN AND WESTERN DISCIPLES,

The 4th of July,
1912.

THE ADVAITA ASHRAMA,
MAYAVATI, HIMALAYAS.

INTRODUCTION.

Coming from Afar are the Voices of the Silence. Rarely are they heard, save by the Mystics and the Sages. And when one of these Voices becomes embodied as Sound audible to mortal hearing,—blessed is the time and blessed are those that hear. Formless is the Spirit and subjective is the vision thereof ; dense is the illusion that hangs as the cosmic veil before Reality ! How divine, therefore, is the personality, which makes objective the vision of the Spirit ! How priceless the history of one who has lifted even a fringe of the Veil ! The opaqueness of illusion becomes transparent by the effulgence of a spiritual personality. Verily, the Spirit Itself becomes revealed ; and those who see are brought face to face with Reality !

To introduce the life of the Swami Vivekananda is to introduce the subject of the spiritual life itself. All the intellectual struggle, all the righteous doubting, all the burning faith, all the unfolding process of the spiritual illumination were revealed in him. As a Man and as a Vedantist he manifested the Manliness which was Sanctity, and the Sanctity which was Manliness ; he manifested the Patriotism which came from the vision of the Dharma, and he manifested the life of *intense activity* as well as of Supreme Realisation, as the fruit of the *true* Insight of Divine Wisdom. He revealed throughout the glory of the Supra-sensuous Life.

The history of his life is the history of great ideas, of spiritual impulses and of monastic glory. It is the history of the Soul's own Revelation, beautifully harmonising the dualistic vision of the Lover and his God, the monistic vision of the Self realised and the consciousness of the Divinity of Man. It is enfolded within the gospel of a newer vision, with fuller apocalyptic revelations, concerning the Inner Nature of Man.

The life of the Swami Vivekananda was as a scroll, gradually unrolled, on which were written all the aspirations and all the greatness of human nature. It was a life like that of all other luminous souls who soared into the region of the Spirit and brought back visions of Truth for those who were blinded by nescience. It was a life, not only of revelations, but of human events, developed under ordinary conditions of experience, that formed the meeting-ground between lovable human personality and the light and awesome majesty of the highest consciousness.

In the reading of the life of the Swami Vivekananda, one is admitted into a world rich with spiritual contents and events and surrounded by a rich spiritual atmosphere. One seems to be, as it were, in a sanctuary before an altar, upon which burns the perpetual lamp of the Soul revealing, in sacramental glory, the Mystery of a great life, in all its developments, its renunciation, its self-sacrifice, its divinely human worth and its spiritual illumination. There are many happenings in the way of insight and prophecy and experience, even from his early boyhood, that take one into the world where saints kneel in prayer and where sages, in meditation, enjoy the Beatific Vision. Psychology and spiritual philosophy go hand in hand in the understanding of the Swami's life, illustrating the mystical events therein as radiant instances of the development of the powers and potentialities of human faculty, so that even in this materialistic age of scepticism and religious indifference, there is added, in brilliant letters, a marvellous chapter to "The Lives of the Saints of the World".

As the Light within the glory of the Swami's life shines forth the Personality of one who is known, revered and verily adored by thousands in India as an *Avatâra* or Incarnation of Divinity—Bhagavân Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva. The Swami Vivekananda could not speak too highly of Sri Ramakrishna. Aye, in one of his most exalted moods, he spoke of him as the greatest of *Avatâras*. It was this Prophet of the Most High who drew out the powers and

possibilities of the young Norendra thereby making possible the life and illumination of the Swami Vivekananda. The process was throughout deeply mystical. The world in which the Swami was spiritually born was a world of spiritual facts and realities, not of idle speculations and complacently accepted dogmas. Prior to his meeting with the Master, when he was as yet only the soaring intellect, the life of the future Swami was one of painful intellectual inquiry, and of great agony of spirit in the longing for Truth ; he was then steeped in the culture of the Western world and was a critical analyser of the religion and the society of his own people. But when he met the Master, from that time he was the Swami Vivekananda in the making. The Dakshineswar Temple-garden, on the banks of the Ganges, near the city of Calcutta, was the place of his Illumination, as it had been that of his Master ; it was there that the sun of the Swami's soul travelled in radiance across the heavens of his life to the full zenith of spiritual effulgence.

Those who have the vision of To-Day witness in the training and discipleship of Norendra the struggle, the trend and the promise of the Modern Transition in India ; for he represented all that was New in the thought-world of India, while his Master embodied all that was Old. And in the story of the blending of these two lives one sees how the New must be and is being reconciled to the Old and how the Old must be and is being saturated with the New. Therefore, for an understanding of the Swami Vivekananda an understanding of his Master is imperative. Being as he was the most famous Man of God in India for several centuries, recognised as having exerted a profound and abiding influence upon Indian ideals and, finally, as being the spirit itself of a Re-presented Hinduism, Sri Ramakrishna and his life and teachings must be carefully taken into account in studying the career of his chief disciple.

Sri Ramakrishna is indeed the Central Figure in the life of the Swami Vivekananda ; not alone that, but also the Central Figure in Modern Hinduism. It was this Man of

God, whose life of Divine Realisation and whose teaching stemmed the tide of Western theological influence over the Hindu consciousness. By sitting at his Feet, the Śwami Vivekananda became the spokesman-in-chief of his message, both to the peoples of the East and the West. And the central episode in the preaching of this message occurred in the World's Parliament of Religions at Chicago, when several thousand people stood to their feet, struck with the tremendous magnetism of the Swami's personality breathing, as it did, an extraordinary spiritual power, at the very first utterance which came from his lips. Sri Ramakrishna the Teacher, Vivekananda the Preacher,—Sri Ramakrishna the Man of Insight, Vivekananda the Prophet of that Insight—these two were as one; through them both shines the effulgence of the Spirit, and the life of the one is incomplete without the life of the other. Indeed, the life of the one is, in the deepest sense, the unfoldment and expansion, the explanation and interpretation of the other.

Since his meeting with the Master the career of the Swami is a career of spiritual romance, a career that gives a wondrous vision of that which is to come in the way of an illumined religious consciousness and a reinvigorated spirit of true renunciation. From the time when the Master entered Nirvāṇa the chief disciple is seen alone—alone—in the silence and the light of his own soul, digesting the teachings he had received, studying the contents and problems of the Indian experience, seeking methods for the practical application of the Sanātana Dharma to modern life, and finding out his own mission. The vision of him is unforgettable as he wanders along, staff in hand, in utter defiance of the world, himself, as it were, a Shiva incarnate. One sees him, later on, before men and women of learning, wealth and distinction, in the rich and powerful West, and one sees him in the Silence before his Master in the chapel of the monasteries at Baranagore and Belur,—but the picture of him as he goes along the highways of Hindusthan, wandering for many, many months, with only his own soul for companionship, is unfor-

gettable. He wanders along impelled by an irresistible power, throwing him hither and thither in the deeper solitudes of his own concentrated personality—aye, the picture of him is unforgettable.

The next vision is that of the indefatigable spiritual worker, carrying the message and the wisdom of the Rishis to the West, cheerfully undergoing hardships and difficulties and ultimately achieving greatest triumphs. One sees him in the world of human divinity and in the world of divine humanity, suffering, hoping, loving, loyal, irritated at the workings of destiny, impatient with his surroundings in one moment, and joyous, all-tender, all-sweet, all-patient in another,—but in heart always resigned to the Lord. One sees him in many moods, now sublime, now sweetly human, now in the august consciousness of the “One without a second,—the Para-Brahman, the Impersonal Supreme”, and then in the consciousness of the devotee of the Mother of the Universe. One sees him, now in India, then in America and in Europe, now with Eastern, then with Western disciples, preaching at all times the beyond-body idea and infusing into them the strength and the consciousness of Pure Spirit. One sees him, in the early days of his wandering monastic life, in poverty and surcharged with the spirit of renunciation, and then one sees him in America surcharged with spiritual omnipotence in the giving of his message and filled with the spirit of a prophet. One sees him thundering forth the gospel of Strength and Illumination before thousands in the East and the West and then, perhaps, with a few devotees, silently moulding their lives and training them to carry on his work, or with his brother-monks, living the life of the ascetic ideals. At all times one sees in him a gigantic soul, making every endeavour to burst the bonds of flesh, and soar into the Vastness of the Spirit. From the years when as a lad the Swami struggled to see God and know the Highest Truth, through the time when he experienced the Supreme Realisation, until the time when he became a World-Figure and the Prophet of the Modern Gospel of the

Sanâtana Dharma—one sees constantly in him, as numerous persons have said, “A God in the Revelation.”

For those who see deeper the Swami is always at the Feet of his Master, one who had given himself uttermost in spiritual abandonment, as a child, to the Mother of the Universe, and who had realised the Impersonal Absolute in the Nirvikalpa Samâdhi. Thus in the Swami one sees combined, in wonderful spiritual harmony, the dualistic and the monistic vision ; for he possessed the love which is inexpressible for the Personal God, and yet he, likewise, possessed the immeasurable knowledge which is the immediate insight into the Divine Nature, wherein the soul itself is realised as one with the Para-Brahman.

Though the utterances of Sri Ramakrishna are mainly those of the Lover for the Lord, still when it is remembered that it was he who gave his chief disciple the spirit and the consciousness of the Advaita, one realises the supreme purpose of the Master that the future message of the Swami was to be that of the Advaita Vedanta, wherein all sense of duality and distinction is swallowed up in the perception of Unutterable Oneness. One also realises that verily in the personality of the Swami Vivekananda the Master himself visited the farthest Western shores and the farthest corners of Hindusthan. It is the Voice of Dakshineswar which is heard at the Parliament of Religions ; it is the Voice of Dakshineswar which preaches, throughout Bhâratavarsha, the Reawakening of the Ancient Dharma.

Though the inter-relatedness of the lives of the Swami Vivekananda and his Master, and the inestimable influence of the latter upon the former, in things spiritual, are admitted facts, yet it must not be forgotten that the Swami himself possessed inherent greatness and unique potentialities and spiritual powers for moving the world, as many significant utterances of Sri Ramakrishna point out. The Swami himself was born with a mission to fulfil. Sri Ramakrishna, it is true, had given him the spirit, but the Swami worked out that spirit into innumerable new forms of his

own. The flow of the perennial thought and the indomitable energy of his soul made its course through untrodden fields. His long, lone marches over the extents of his land as the wandering monk, when he attained the very highest flights of the monastic consciousness, were inspired by his own personal longing to touch, for himself, the Spirit of Things, and to find new application and undreamed-of expression of the culture and the attainments of the Old India in the New. He was inspired by his own nature to sound its own depths by its own aid, and to give away the fruits of his realisations freely for the material and the spiritual salvation of others.

Previously one will have had the vision of the Swami in communion with the Master, but later one finds him communing with his own soul, as did the Rishis of old, receiving newer and newer inspirations, going beyond all gods and all forms and all Masters in the Supreme Realisation of the Brahman. Thus in the reading of his life one is brought face to face with a world of majesty and power and sublimity where the panorama of the highest spiritual order is always present before the eye.

Not only as a monk does he travel, but as a prophet and patriot, observing constantly the customs, the usages and the culture of Hindusthan in all its parts. He busies himself with historic memories of the Past and with historic visions of the Future ; he prays and weeps and hopes for a Better To-Morrow in the land of his birth ; and he is exultant and enthusiastic at what he perceives to be its inherent powers for constant Rejuvenescence and Adaptation. He becomes a Seer of the intrinsic superiorities in its Dharma and of the ultimate purposes of its social forms. He feels the heart-beats of the nation and comes to know wherein its life lies. He analyses and sees the strength and the greatness of the Hindu spiritual outlook, though he does not spare vigorous criticism of the way in which its highest ideals are being betrayed. Aye, even prior to the acquisition of his fame in the West, the Swami was the truest of patriots.

And yet again, the Swami Vivekananda, as an original

thinker and a spiritual genius, was the scatterer of luminous ideas which were his own, seeds whose growth is visible in various theological movements throughout the world. It is certainly within the province of legitimate statement to say that the Swami Vivekananda was one of the main channels through which flowed the mighty currents of the Modern Spiritual Transition. His masterly address at the Parliament of Religions alone entitles him to the high status of the Arch-Prophet of Hinduism. He was the foremost of those spiritual waves, the tumult of which as it dashed against the shores of present time, thundered the spiritual ideals and contents of the modern religious epoch. Like a new Sankarācharya he became the foremost spokesman of Indian Idealism in his time. His was a new vision of religious philosophy. He infused new blood into the Vedanta, that synthesis of Indian thought systems, and breathed into it a new life so that it might become once more a living reality, a concrete, moral and emotional power in the practical life of the masses, whilst meeting the requirements of the highest minds which yearn to transcend all limitations and attain the Freedom of the Divine Consciousness. He infused into philosophy the burning fires of his own passionate longing for and his illumination of the Truth. He insisted upon the mystical experience as the only guarantee of spiritual certitude and discovery. He preached a Gospel to which scholastic theology must ever be subordinate, the Gospel whose message throbs with luminous personal awareness, the Gospel whose sole authority is *Spiritual Realisation*. Such indeed is the impression upon the minds of those with whom he had intimate spiritual and intellectual relationship.

In India, it goes without saying that the Swami Vivekananda was a unique personality. In the reading of his life one sees how he emphasised the Unification of Hinduism, reconciling the various conflicting thought-systems of the Indian pluralistic and monistic outlook in an eclecticism hitherto unthought of. He was the prophet of the Upanishads, but he was also the prophet of Modernism and of Social

Service, thus preaching the ideals of Siva and of Seva. He declared with an apostolic fervour that Brahman is to be realised not only by worship and meditation but also by serving others, seeing the Divinity in them. He laid stress not only on the Dharma of Sannyās but on the Dharma of Citizenship as well, pointing out the opportunity for the realisation of the spiritual consciousness in all the walks of life. As will be seen he was the founder of a new order of philosophical thought, a new order of religious statement, a new order of national righteousness, and the founder of a new order of monks and a new spirit of monasticism. In the final understanding of the Swami one finds him a Hindu and an Indian to the core of his heart. One sees him pondering upon the incomparable ideals and realisations of the Indian experience, championing the cause of his Motherland wheresoever he went in the years of his intensely active career. With the spirit of true patriotism he fulminated against the superstitions, weaknesses and shortcomings of his own people ; but he also mercilessly denounced those who heaped upon Hindu culture malicious or ignorant criticism. He was intensely an Indian ; but above all things he was intensely a seer and an upholder of Truth. He was inherently cosmopolitan ; he loved the whole world as he loved India. His sympathies were world-wide ; he saw greatness wheresoever it manifested itself.

So far as India is concerned, the Swami, when he returns from the West, becomes the preacher of a fiery gospel, the Gospel of Karma Yoga. The conquest of the whole world by Indian spirituality and the raising of the masses became his mottoes for bringing about the redemption of India, and he at the same time pointed out the methods and the means of carrying them into effect. Unlike the Rishis of old, whose sole concern was their personal salvation and whose sole bliss was to be immersed in the deeps of meditation, the Swami advocated a Practical Vedanta, a Vedanta making for a new national spirit, a spirit of public service, wherein the subjective vision of the One should be transformed into

objective service for the Many. And one still hears his voice crying out to serve the Nârâyana in the poor, the sick, the downtrodden and the oppressed. He knew that the Modern Transition in India could not come to full fruition if the *People* were not taken into account. Therefore, while in the West one finds him uttering constantly the philosophy of the highest Vedanta, urging the Western world to meditation, in the East one finds him preaching the spirit of public service, the spirit of a religious national life, the spirit of social unity and the spirit of a social reform whose method is to be a "growth from within". After his return from the West, therefore, one finds him establishing monasteries as centres of training and preaching, and organising centres of service; by the influence of his moving spirit the monks of Ramakrishna and the Sannyâsin disciples of the Swami, become the founders of charitable dispensaries, Sevâshramas and orphanages, as well as workers for the relief of famine and other kinds of distress and suffering. Thus the Swami embodied in his own nature the four *Mârgas* or Paths of the Dharma,—that of Insight, of Contemplation, of Love and that of Service. He was, in truth, the very Synthesis of Hinduism as it should be.

But the story must be told even as it is told of every man,—"And he was born in the city of—and in the year of—" But what a life was his! The dream of childhood he passed as all others; the dream of youth—but what a dream! He would see the Heavens roll back, revealing the Presence of the Most High! He would pierce, even as youth, through all the childish struggles and childish dreams of man, at once into the Tabernacle where God dwells! He would see God as Man, and Man as God; he would see the Divinity Within, and the Divinity Without! Illumination Itself is God; and he had That; he was That! Then the years of Silence as a wanderer over the face of his land! Then the years of his Message and his triumph! Then the end and the breaking of the dream, in the Final and Nirvikalpa Samâdhi,—and now the Power of his Illumination!

O the halo of the most sacred sanctuary now about him!

To the task of writing the life one sets fervently, with folded thought, kneeling in soul and in conscious unworthiness, for who can know the inner self of even the least of men, much less the soul of a Vivekananda ! And who can sound the depths of his personal realisation ! The task is almost beyond thinking,—and yet must the world know the greatness of that life which has thrilled through its Eastern Heart and Western Mind.

Thought cannot pierce the veils as much as prayer and religious intent. So let these be the spirit of the work. And may that Silent Watcher in each heart, on Whom he so constantly meditated, the Message of Whose Supreme Life he so wonderfully gave, and unto Whom he has now been caught up in Supreme Realisation, guide us in our work and be with us and the reader now and forever.

Hari Om Tat Sat.

I

EVEN WITH THE GENERATION ANCESTRAL.

Streams of consciousness which flow into the river of family are here and there characterised by the likeness of personality and sameness of tendency. Thus, it is often seen that the third or the fourth generation takes on the qualities of the great-grandfather, or of some other distant ancestor. Then it is said, "It is in the blood." It is the only accountable reason for those remarkable and reiterated croppings-up of family tendency.

With him who became known to the world as the Swami Vivekananda, it was in the blood—the tendency to that life and thought which made him the foremost Indian monk of his time and the teacher of the West. Down the river of tendency we glimpse the cause.

A youth of twenty-five, with all the promise of the world before him,—a career of unusual promise beckoning, himself peculiarly fit in education, versed in Persian and Sanskrit, gifted in song,—could not understand the world. It was a riddle to him. Religion had grown reality to him. God called—deeply, insistently. The call could not be withstood. With Christ he felt that urge, "Who is my mother and who are my brethren!" And he heard the voice, "He who loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." The man clad in a beggar's rags forsook home, wife, child, comfort—and plunged into forgottenness, as a lion goes into the forest,—free, strong and of iron bent.

The wife and child were cared for by the relatives. The wife understood and, understanding, loved the deeper. For in India where consciousness is looked upon as the reality in man—it is known that such exalted heights of feeling and vision may be attained, that a man is cast by the tempest of his own soul from the life of the world into eternal thinking

upon God. This is the ideal. Blessed is the family in which one attains such a state of God-striving and God-consciousness ! The soul has become the reality. By the husband having become aware of it, the wife is raised ; by the wife having become aware of it, the husband is raised. For that is the purpose of man—the beatific vision of the soul. And though the humanity of the wife, or of the mother, or of the husband, or of the father may long for the absent one, still does the soul know, " All is well," and the bonds of the relationship are knit closer because one of the circle has seen God. He of whom this is said—the youth of twenty-five, was Durga Charan Dutta, the paternal grandfather of the Swami Vivekananda.

Let it not be imagined that the mind of Durga Charan Dutta was like that of a visionary, or of a fanatic. Quite the contrary. Some of the greatest saints have been of the most practical turn. Only remember that wonderful woman, Saint Theresa of Jesus, of the Roman Catholic Church. How she was at once the admirable Saint and the capable executive of the affairs of a large order of nuns ! So in this case.

Durga Charan was not a dreamer—or rather, he was a dreamer, but one of those dreamers who carry dreams into the field of reality, carving out all the exquisiteness of ideal things from this rough marble world of real things. Master of languages, he was also master of the law. His father, Ram Mohan Dutta, was by profession a lawyer and was well known. In consequence of his proficiency the family had become possessed of much worldly goods. The Duttas were the owners of large estates and of a comfortable income, and the family house was in the Simla District of the city of Calcutta. And Durga Charan Dutta was so well versed in the law that his father made him partner in his affairs. The son soon equalled his father in reputation. He, too, grew wealthy.

Therefore, it was a genuine case of renunciation. Only he who has can give ; and only he who has had the wherewithal to enjoy, can renounce. That is why the renunciation

of Saint Francis of Assisi was so exalted. The intensity of insight and of feeling that brought on the renunciation was so divine, that forsaking his family, nobility of name and great fortune was really nothing to him. Renunciation, if it is real, is always a joyous giving-up of that which is nothing in comparison to what has been found. There is nothing greater than the soul. There can be nothing more than God. The saint of the East and the saint of the West are one in this.

But where was the direction of the quest of forgottenness when illumination came? No one knows. Was it Benares, the city of learning and the city of saints? Who knows? At all events, something occurred some time later in Benares which leaves no doubt that this was one of the sacred places the world-forsaking monk had in mind. For there are many, many places unimaginably holy to the wandering monk. There are the sacred birth-places where saints have come into the world, and the more sacred places of renunciation where saints have seen God beyond the world. There is Buddha-Gaya, where Buddha saw Truth, just as man sees an object. There is Brindaban where Sri Krishna, the Indian Christ, spent the days of His childhood, and where He later on won the hearts of the Gopis,—who represent human souls, all through their lives consciously or unconsciously drawn to the Lord. Then there is Hardwar, beautiful Hardwar, with its neighbour, Hrishikesh—the gateway of those mighty mountains, the Himalayas. And at Hardwar there are innumerable monks. Some of them have been everywhere in India. Their feet have travelled the wandering courses of all its rivers, from their sources, along their lengths, down to where they lose themselves in the ocean. They have seen the plateaus and the plains and the lesser ranges that kneel from north to south, or from east to west, as lesser angels, before the great Himalayan peaks. Then there are the great monasteries founded by the boy-saint and boy-thinker, Shankaracharya, who re-made and re-introduced Hinduism and wrote all his commentaries on the endless Vedas before he

had reached his sixteenth year. Then there are the monastic centres founded by other lesser mystics, but all interesting to the monk-wanderer who desires no roof under which to rest, but only the presence of the Inner Wisdom, and who makes it his business to repeat the Name of God, or else plunge into eternal meditation upon His reality and beatitude.

O the quest to be alone, the long silence and solitude and the joy of being alone under starry skies with God ! O the unquenchable sense of perfect freedom as the monk unseen goes along great byways of land and stream and hill ! O the freedom from tumultuous gatherings of men, the joy of calling out the Name of God where none will hear and where he can call as loud as his voice will carry in speech the sacred thought ! Think of his bliss in the wilderness and forest where the monk depends for his very sustenance on Him who spreads the wings of the birds for flight ! Think of the consciousness that "All is He," even when danger threatens ! There was the case of that man who cried out, "I am one with the Lord ! I am one with the Lord !" even when in the mouth of the jungle-tiger ; and the on-looking villagers said to themselves, when their terror had subsided, "He is with God." O the plenitude of that life and its richness ! "Give up all, O fool," says the monk. Or he says, as he did to the rich man, "It is not I who have renounced, but thou." Heights and depths of everlasting consciousness ! The presence of God, the consciousness of the soul always with one ! Like a king is the monk, like a fearless lion is the wandering monk. He has left the world as it was said of Rama, the Warrior-God, "He plunged into the forest as the sun enters a mass of clouds." Who would not give up the trinkets of the world for That !

And the sublime romance of the soul going out as a lover to find its God ! Passing many nations and many peoples, seeing them only with mortal sight, because the vision is fixed on God ! Passing the extents of many lands, but ever residing in the place and peace of the Most High ! There-

fore, how can the monk take heed of physical things ? Sometimes he has gone so far beyond worldly-consciousness that he goes about like a child, unaware of the body. That is the highest state of blessedness, the state of the Paramahansa, or Great Swan of Soul who, though residing in the waters of this world, knows he is not of it, for he floats upon its surface, gifted with the royally divine knowledge that he is the free. What cares he for conventions ?

They are just like children, the great monks. Some of them wear their hair just as it grows. Some shave it off to the crown. Some roll it up in great masses and knots. Some leave their beard to grow. Some feel it a hindrance and shave it off. Some clothe themselves in a rag. Some do not even do that. Some wear long, flowing robes. Some carry a cloth which they wear when they approach the haunts of man. O the joy of that freedom when the body is treated by each one just in that very way whereby he most easily forgets it ! And then to have no home ! What home can hold the monk ? What occupation will he have, but the thought of God ? Food ? That comes as it will. Sometimes it is the fare of John the Baptist. Sometimes it is the fare that Christ had when in the desert, before the world knew Him. Sometimes it is several days' fasting. Yes, there are times when there may be a complete absence of food. When the play is over the monk goes into Illumination.

All this Durga Charan Dutta saw at twenty-five. A great vision for a lad ! Most men, at that age, are occupied in thought with other things. But there was no half-way method with this young man. He could not serve God and Mammon at one and the same time. So he served God—and chose the better part. He had often seen Sadhus, as monks are called in India, or Sannyasins, as they are otherwise known. He used to have them come to his house and he would feed them. He would see them wandering with their staff and begging-bowl through the streets of the city, which Sadhus sometimes visit, and would beg them to

come. They would come, because they were attracted to him. A Sadhu knows men, and because of his knowledge he avoids or associates with them.

There would be great talks between the monks and Durga Charan Dutta. They would tell him of realisations and thoughts that are above the ordinary man's understanding, as the stars. And there would be ecstasy and the scaling of mountains of feeling which few mortals know. But to gain that consciousness permanently—one must renounce everything. But who would not do this if he knew ?

So the eye of the mind follows Durga Charan Dutta—no more known by that name, however, for the monk, whether he be of the East or of the West, forsakes all name except that of God or Saints. Instead of the family name he assumes the name of some attribute of deity or soul. For example, he might have been known as Paramananda, which means, "Bliss in the Supreme." But he might not have taken any name. He might have wandered along, covered with ashes, refusing to speak, even to ask for food. There are monks even of this severe ascetic type, who receive food only when it is offered, unasked for by themselves. These are the great ones who never stay in any village or city for more than three days, lest attachment for the place or a person of the place capture the heart. Sometimes this extends even to trees. There was once a saint who lived under a banyan tree in the depth of a forest for twelve years. And at the end of that time a voice came to him and said, "Get out from under this tree. It has become Maya to you." And Maya is the name for the illusion of the senses and thought, which obsesses even the wisest of men ; it is the name for bondage in any form. And the saint left that place and wandered like an elephant evermore without any permanent abiding-place.

The grandfather of the Swami Vivekananda had become such a man, or is "man" not sufficiently defining a name for one who has had this romance of the soul, this outlook upon

life ? He had forgotten all about the world, even of home, just as Lord Buddha had forgotten. And the mind's eye sees him wandering through forests and cities, villages and mountainous retreats.

Five or six years had passed—then he was in Benares. But before he went there, it might have been that he had scaled the interminable heights of the Himalayan snows, even visiting that region of eternal snows, where the Lord dwells on the sacred Kailas peak. Above the marts of men, in eternal purity and silence, He dwells as Shiva, God of monks, immersed in eternal meditation, while the world rumbles on. There with the snows and the silence and with God—many a saint has soared on the pinions of highest thought—and transcending even thought, found his soul in the presence of the Lord.

How strange is life ! How complex the incidents that are of the weaving of destiny ! It was at Benares that an event happened full of the most touching humanity for him who was the monk. At that time even renunciation might have been a pang,—so deep aye, so divine is the love between the soul of a man and the soul of a woman. But to the story !



II

THE TRIUMPH OF RENUNCIATION.

Pilgrimage ! Around it India gathers from north to south, from east to west in a fervour of triumphant unity. Here, and in religion, and in the spiritual outlook, India is one. Need one wonder then, that the bereft wife of him who was Durga Charan Dutta should take to pilgrimage ? All these years—what had she been ? What had been her soul's inmost intention during this long period of separation ? Only to bedimmed eyes, to eyes of self could there have been separation. The wife and the husband were one, for the wife had, from the day of her husband's setting out on the divine quest, given her thought and all her life to God, joining in his desire, becoming one with him in the flame of his intention.

And there was Visvanath, the son. Even the sense of mother she had transcended. This boy was hers in a larger trust only, not as a possession. All these years she had been what a mother should be, but selflessly so. And he had grown up, strong and vigorous, childish, turbulent and full of joy.

When the time was ripe and the boy had outgrown the helplessness of earliest childhood, she made up her mind to carry out into action her desire to go to Benares.

Benares ! What romance the name has spelt throughout the ages ! It has ever been the feudal centre of Hinduism. The greatest thinkers of India, all its heroes, all its saints have, at one time or another in their lives, visited this city. It is even to this day what it was in the days when the foot-prints of Lord Buddha were impressed upon it,—the seat of Brāhmanical learning, the fountain-centre of orthodoxy, the ecclesiastical Rome of India. All the romance, all the struggle, all the realisation of the Indian Sages are encom-

passed there. What Jerusalem was to the early mediæval pilgrim, that even to this very moment is the city of Benares to Hinduism. All customs gather here, for all India's people come here. This is the heart of Hinduism. Old age moves to death most willingly in this place ; and in this place the deathly sick consider it their privilege to be released from pain. Every Hindu dreams of Benares as a place sometime, somehow to be visited.

There it is—in a great semi-circle to-day, laved by the waters of the imperious Ganges. Temples and palaces rise sheer from the water's edge upon high embankments of stone and bricks. Here and there one sees the pinnacle of a temple, or the cornice or the pillar of a palace peering above the water's surface. It had long since fallen out of place by the strong currents of the flooded waters. Along the line of the river rise the spacious Ghats. Thousands are always there, bathing and praying. Bathing, as of olden times, in India, is with the Hindus a sacramental act. There—behold the burning-ghats and the smouldering heaps of charred bodies from which the soul has found escape ! And there sits one in meditation, lost to the world. And through the motley crowd, past crowded bazars, full of Oriental life and colour, past magnificent temples and through narrowest by-lanes, here and there a Sadhu is observed, bent on reality. His external appearance may be terrible, with its manifest asceticism, but O for the thought of the man ! O for the thought of the hundreds of thousands who come from the ends of India to pour forth their soul in prayer and in realisation here !

To-day there are trains, but in those other distant days, trains were unknown ; and thus we find mother and son housed, among other pilgrims, in a big boat that moved by the oars of many men from Calcutta to Benares, a distance of about five hundred miles. There were hardships and romance combined. New cities, new scenes, new customs, new peoples, even a new language came by the way as the boat, on its long journey, took the inmates on and on. And

then—of the river, the water, with all its interminable length and diverse paths, was holy, as holy as the baptismal water which washes whiter than snow the sin-stained soul. For so the Hindu believes. It was "Mâ Gangâ", Mother Ganges. For the Hindus the river is a goddess—a great, self-conscious entity that moves, with imperious grandeur, over the extent of the Indian soil. There is the old, old story of how this is but the shadow of the heavenly Ganges that Brahmâ, the Creator, caught up in his water-carrying bowl and poured upon the Feet of the Lord of the universe. How thence it fell upon the matted locks of Shiva, the Lord of monks, and how thence to earth and the plains of Hindusthan, is a many-times told tale.

Six weeks a wanderer in a boat ! Six weeks of the Ganges ! Six weeks of daily excitement ! Six weeks of sunrise and sunset on this, the queen of India's rivers ! How impressionable the mind of a child ! All this while the future father of the Swami Vivekananda was gathering, into one great emotional ensemble, the unforgettable pageant of this journey which, in its turn, became one of those primal elements in the making of that romantic temperament which the Swami inherited from his father. And here was the sense of adventure and learning and love for the beautiful instilled, all at one and the same time. How were the days filled ? With long readings aloud from the epics and the Puranas. Now the story of Rama, the King-warrior Incarnation, was told ; and His love for Sita and the great struggle through which the lovers passed were dwelt upon. Or there were the many stories of the Indian Christ-child, Sri Krishna. For example, how one day His mother gazing into the mouth of her Child saw the whole universe resting there. And so on, and many hundred other legends, similar to this.

O the fresh mornings and the cool, starry nights on the river with the rising sun or moon ! O the hushed silence of early dawn and later evening, broken only by the sound of the splashing oars ! O the chant of the boatmen as they

swung their oars ! The boat was a huge thing ; and while some rowed, others paced a few steps and punted with long bamboo poles. And the sails when the wind was up ! How picturesque ! Then there were the days of anxious expectancy. They were counted by the pilgrims,—ten, seven, five, three days—and then the boat would find its way through avenues made by other boats, into the circular sweep of the Ganges at Benares !

Each morning the sun was worshipped and at each noon and evening, as the symbol of the Divine Vivifier of the universe and of the understanding. Then there were hours of story-telling and hours of chant, hours of play and serious hours for meditation. Then there were hours for cooking and times for eating ; and then, there were the cool, cool nights when sleep was blessedness.

But what tragedies may happen on a holiday ! Sometimes death comes near. It came in this case with frightful menace. On a certain morning, just as the long journey was fast nearing its completion, Visvanath who loved the boat as a huge interesting live thing, was, as usual, prying into its nooks and corners, when an old board on which he had jumped too hard, gave way. It was just on the edge, and the boy toppled over into the water. The mother was looking on. She could not swim, but O the love of a mother ! A great splash ! She had jumped overboard in a hopeless effort to snatch the child from the river. The current was swift. Both were sinking, but the mother had caught hold of the child by the hand, and death, itself, could hold no tighter than she did at that time. The men who had seen the terrible occurrence were at a loss as to what to do. The two had drifted behind the boat. Then one saw the long, long raven-black hair on the yellow water. He plunged in. Another, to whom he called, plunged in after him. A third and a fourth were in the water. Several energetic movements and the first man had the long mass of hair in a tight grasp. That saved the mother. It also saved the child. The mother had

not let loose the intensity of her grip on the child's hand. Though semi-conscious, she still held on with a death-grip. All his life long the child bore the marks of this overwhelming love and sacrifice of his mother.

Another day—and there was Benares, the long-expected ! How happy were the hearts of the weary pilgrims ! All the long, anxious expectancy had served to intensify the joy of this moment. Yes,—there was Benares ! O all the sacred memories of tales of this city ! Happy, happy, thrice happy were the pilgrims—and of all of them, hardly anyone was as eager with joy and keen anticipation of the many joyous days to come, as was the self-sacrificing mother of Visvanath. Then, also, there was the joy of meeting the group of relatives of the Dutta family.

O the ecstasy of life in Benares ! Each temple would be visited. Daily the bath should be taken from the great, sacred bathing-ghats. There was the Golden Temple of Visvanath, the Lord of the universe. Then there was the temple of Vireswar, or Lord of heroes,—and who is the Lord of heroes ? Why, Shiva, the God of monks ! And she particularly selected this temple as the especial shrine of her devotion. Her heart desired to offer prayer for one who had become the servant of Shiva.

The stress of incessant prayer and pilgrimage was relieved by the splendid panorama life offers in Benares. The heart-throbbings of a whole world are here and the whole heart throbs to things of the soul. Here is the place of the deification of man, of the constant worship of God in man. The ecstatic state remains longer with the soul in this spot that is like a colossal cathedral in which all thought is prayer and all desire, aspiration. As a perpetual light before the sacred Presence, is the prayer that rises unto God in Benares. Though all noise is hushed in silence at night in the holy city, the sound of ascending prayer continues ever. For prayer is never-ending in Benares.

One day after another the pilgrim mother made her way among the crowded lanes from the bathing-place to the

Temple of Visvanath, the Lord of the universe. Many Sadhus had passed her. She had seen them all. She thought—but why! Was it some wild, unimaginable hope?—*He* might be among them? On a certain day, after she had been to the bathing-ghat, she betook herself, as usual, to this temple, and had almost reached its sacred precincts when a monk cried aloud, “O, Mother has fallen!” and ran to her assistance. Aye,—she had fallen to the ground, struck faint with astonishment and overwhelming emotion. “It was *he*; it was *he*!” And now that very monk, not knowing who she was who had fallen, picked her up tenderly and laid her gently on the temple steps. She awakened from her dazed state. Their eyes met, and in an instant what worlds of different feeling played in their hearts! But the man had renounced. Aye, even so had the woman done. He was seen a moment later, walking at a rapid pace, murmuring, “O the Maya! O the Maya!”

And she—she had crossed the temple-compound and was kneeling at the Feet of the Lord. In the depth of her soul she was glad. For while there was renunciation for them both—there was the holiness of God in his face and the peace of the Lord in her heart!

III

THE HOUSE AND HOME OF THE LORDLY DUTTAS.

A PRINCELY FATHER.

Few are the echoes of that life which was saved by the love of a mother in the Ganges years ago. But here and there we are privileged with a vision, and it is always one of greatness. He who became the Swami Vivekananda said, speaking of his father in much later days, "Wherever my father's blood went, there was greatness." A romantic nature, fully emancipated from pettiness and narrowness in any line,—the father of the Swami Vivekananda was a prince among those with whom he moved. It was in his time that the family acquired that splendid title, "The Lordly Duttas."

In the city of Calcutta there is a large district, Simla by name. Fifty years ago there was an atmosphere about it which spoke of rank and wealth. To-day the onward business pressure of a city's growth has crowded out the spacious compounds and gardens that once surrounded the houses, and it has turned the out-houses of many of the residences into scores of tiny shops. Narrow lanes have been made by the too close crowding of buildings on either side. The lane that leads to the premises of the house of the Duttas,—for now it is only a lane—is known as "Gour Mohan Mookherjee's Street." Formerly things were different. There it stands, as of old, the ancient house. Because of the straitened circumstances of the family, a whole section, serving formerly as a temple-compound where the members worshipped, has gone into the hands of others. And the same must be told of other parts and lands that were the Duttas' in other times. The

house itself still stands. The doorway that fronts upon the street is massive. It might have served the purposes of a gateway. Certainly in the room built to the left, the old days saw a *Durwan* in constant attendance. But now the room is gray with age; and on the other side one sees the relic of a great chair that the father used in his lifetime, over which his famous son, as a boy, used to scamper, and which is now cherished in sacred memory. These are touching memories of old days. But in those days there were several such doorways,—themselves proud sentinels of the inmates behind their visible strength. In observing so many Hindu doorways one is translated into the periods of Egyptian architecture with its massive and yet intense simplicity. The covered hall with the room on one side and the sitting-space on the other, is an approach to a second doorway. Behind this is the courtyard with the living-houses limiting its compound. In India houses are inevitably built about a courtyard.

What memories are those of Indian courtyards! Here is the romance of the Indian world. Here the children make their playground and play. Here the strict guard of the zenana is softened—and here, in this particular house, if one is so privileged, he sees maidens with deep, dark eyes, attending to the duties of the household. Here are the utensils of shining brass. And here are the ringing merry laughter and the talking and the freedom that are always locked up in inscrutable silence and behind a veiled countenance to the outside of the great doorway. Here the babies play, with nothing as dress save a silver chain to relieve the brown velvet of their skins. And here their eyelashes and the spaces above and under their eyes are painted to make it cool for them to see, when the sun is fierce with heat. And here are the old and tried servants. What an endeared position they hold in the Indian family. It is even to this extent, that the children of the family must look upon the servants of their father and their mother as brothers, sons, and daughters of the household. And it may be that over

the whole household, as its guardian angel watches the aged venerable widow, the mother of the house and its head.

In this particular house, to the right are the rooms for the men members. And just before the entrance rooms is the long veranda where feasts are spread in the great entertainments. This is but one story in height. Facing the doorway to the house, and across the courtyard, adjoining the compartment for the men members, rises the zenana, two stories in height. Below, is the Oriental kitchen in all its convenient simplicity. Above, are the dwelling chambers. From the latticed enclosure the purdah ladies could see into the courtyard when the great Pujas, or religious ceremonies, were performed in the old days, to the beating of drums and the blowing of conch-shells and the prayers of many on-lookers. It was here that the semblances of the gods were worshipped on the occasion of their respective festivities. All the art of the artisan is spent in beauty upon these images which are made of clay ; and yet so resplendently are they decorated and exquisitely wrought. Following the Puja the image is borne to the river with lights and bands playing music, to be consigned to the sacred waters of the Ganges. From the purdah enclosure the ladies can watch the assembled male guests and see their rejoicings at the time of festival and friendship. The purdah is the privileged part. All the niceties and all the richness of the family life are here, and what a life ! No intruder ! Only the faces of those who are well-beloved are seen ; and here are heard the prattle of the children and the voices of love.

But the blessing of every Hindu household is the roof. It is the sought-out place for the evening and the night. But this is Oriental from the Bay of Bengal to the hills of far-off Judæa. It was of old ; it is so even now. There is only the deep Indian night, only the mystic canopy of stars for roof. And every house-roof is such that it excludes the eyes of strangers. Here one is alone, except with the love of the family and the sanctity of home. Resting in comfort upon the roof, the children dream happy dreams, and the maidens

discuss in soft tones the destinies which will be theirs. Or it may be that the bride-maiden, returning for a few days to the house of her father, will bring her silent meditation here. And the worries and the weariness are forgotten here in the coolness and the freshness of the evening's breeze.

Year in and year out this was the day's atmosphere and this was the home of Visvanath, who was last thought of with his mother in Benares. They had returned, the mother to her assemblage of domestic duties, the boy to play with his fellows and to be initiated into the mysteries of school.

The years rolled by from day to day. The boy had grown to be the pride of the Duttas. He ranked high in his youthful accomplishments and the hearts of his people were set upon him in hope and expectation—and there was every promise of fulfilment.

It was in the twelfth year of his life that one day a Sannyasin walked with that freedom which years of life in the open give, into the courtyard of the Dutta home. Instinctively, the boy ran to him. But instead of being caught up in the arms of the monk he found that he was being blessed. The hand of benediction rested on his head—and the boy bowed down and took the dust of the wanderer's feet, which is the Oriental form of most respectful salutation.

There are rules that guide the life of the wandering monk. One of them enjoins, not so much as a duty but as a pious observance, that he visit the place of his birth when twelve years of that life in the thought of God have been completed. By that time all attachment has been erased for those outward relations that depend on form and qualities of form. Then, too, the body of the monk is considered dead. The consciousness of the monk is one-d with Shiva. There is a picture of Shiva filled with deep, wondrous symbolism. He carries with Him a dead body, or rather the dead body is bound to Him. And the monk himself is Shiva,—the Great Monk, and to his own soul the body he wears is dead ; and thus in his own case the symbolic picture of Shiva is made incarnate.

It was *he* once more. But that he had come to his own house was a matter, not of his own will, but at the insistence of a friend and neighbour at whose house he had called. The latter informed the family and they brought him to his own former home. The monk was locked up as if he were a priceless treasure. It was insisted that he must return to the world, for the son's sake, if for none other. What temptation! He must leave. He had not expected this. Three days he was kept—but on the fourth day he made his escape. In coming to his place of birth it was but a sacramental act he had performed, an injunction of the Law.

On the highway again! What thought of wife and son! Yes, the son he had seen, but then it was the Lord's child, not his. The wife? He had not seen her. While the birth-place must be visited, those mortal sentiments that renew bondage may not be awakened. Dead to the world is the monk! Had he thought of her? Aye,—but she had been dead a year since, glorying all the while in his triumphant renunciation, and herself breathing the same spirit of renunciation to the end. He heard this;—and breathing a great prayer for the casting aside of all illusion, he went forth into the open and into the future—heard of nevermore. Thereafter there was much inferring by the loved ones left behind, but never was there knowledge of his whereabouts.

And Visvanath grew up to man's estate, versed in the languages and all the modes of Oriental thought. He adopted the legal profession as a family inheritance; and he made his knowledge of the law felt in distant parts of the land, as well as at home; even so did his reputation grow. He was a man of means, and one who believed in living life intensely. It was for this reason that he lived that life which made the family of the Duttas enviably famous as "lordly." He felt freedom with all the intensity of a passionate understanding. He moved and thought and lived as he felt; and he lived as the wind. But, withal, he was a man who loved the depth of learning. A scholar was he of that ardent type which seeks for reality in thought and knowledge. But to him, what to

others was study, was natural illumination. He played with knowledge; for the greatness of his intellectual capacity made it all play to him. History was his intellectual intensity. How he loved to classify the tempests of the nations into world syntheses and conceptions, carving out from the perusal of the world's experience that sublime morality which sees deeper than good and deeper than evil!

He had that master-understanding of men and a consequent compassion for the afflicted which made him known for charity and sympathy. Criticised at one time for having given something to an inveterate drunkard, he replied in that deep spiritual way he had, "What does it matter? Life is so wretched as it is; it will not hurt to make a poor fellow forget the wretchedness of it for a moment, even if he does spend the money on drink." It was his belief that only in experience does the soul grow, not through any reform method. Only when a man has had all his desires that are of a lesser order fulfilled, will he awaken within himself a higher order of reality both in thought and in desire.

He was always at odds with life. Unconsciously he sensed himself greater than the farce of it all. It was wretchedness as commonplacely lived. So he lived it intensely and romantically. No one knew at what time he would leave home for distant parts. His reputation was such and his learning and his capacity for friendship were so great that he could not escape being well-known; and soon the news of his whereabouts would reach his Calcutta friends. He was a man who realised from a mere worldly point of view that the network of society with its struggles and its flaws was a very inferior thing, no matter how important people might believe their own will-o'-the-wisp chasing to be and that there must be something in the way of higher reality beyond.

Indeed, he was one of the "grand men" of Calcutta. But he possessed much sweetness, as well. His family was closest to his heart. He was proud of his bequest to the immediate generation. He simply knew that things would be well with the children—aye, particularly with that imperial-

mind son of his, Norendra, the future Vivekananda. So he took not much care, as over-anxious people do,—for he knew himself and he knew them. In all things a connoisseur, it is not strange to find him foremost in the arts of the commonplace kitchen. Something startlingly new must always happen in the realm of the kitchen—and so, every day a new dainty dish must be prepared for the guests and that, too, by his own hand. This man was a king amongst entertainers, a most surprising host. He entertained in such fashion, that even to this day it is a memory. As to charity, he was a man whom the poor loved, and for very good reason, for Visvanath Dutta was a father to the poor.

As an instance of the character of the man,—there was a time when Norendra, his eldest son, came to him with the question, "What have you done for me?" Instantly came the reply, "Go, look at yourself in the mirror!" And there was understanding at the moment for the son. He knew that his father was a king amongst men, verily as the Vedas say, "a bull among the herd."

There was another time, also, when Norendra came to him for instruction in the ways of the world, asking his father what were the elements of real good manners. And the father said, "Never show surprise!" Was it this laconic counsel from his parent that, followed out, made it possible for Vivekananda in his later life to walk with equal dignity into the palaces of the East and West and into the huts and hovels of the poorest of India's poor!

Still does one come across aged persons who knew the father of the Swami Vivekananda. When his name is referred to, however, it is as of one who created unforgettable impressions and made great friendships wherever he went—and as of one who, in all conditions of life and circumstances of fortune, was every inch a man, every inch a king.

IV

THE DREAM OF BHUVANESWARI MATA.

Whosoever knows the longing of a mother that a son shall be born to her, enters into the world where Bhuvanewari Dutta, the wife of the princely Visvanath Dutta, hoped and prayed. At a certain time, when she had already given birth to two daughters the desire for a son came upon her with all that intensity of blessed pain and silent and patient expectancy that makes of a woman, the transfigured human personality. Two tiny girls played before her, but she, the wife and mother, was wrapt in solitude of thought. Ever and anon she would breathe a prayer aloud. Those who loved and knew her, read intensity of longing in her eyes and they knew, but spoke nothing. Every Hindu mother and every Hindu father look forward to the birth of a son as the effulgent climax of their fortune, for then the injunction of the Shastras, or Laws, has been kept, and there shall be the line of posterities and the link shall have been forged, out of the materials of love and suffering, between the future and the past.

The mother is the first in the household to welcome the dawn; and her round of daily duties finished, she betakes herself to prayer and spiritual thought. As soon as the eyes have been opened from sleep, the first word uttered by Hindu lips must be the Name of the Lord. This, too, must be the last thought and the last utterance when sleep closes the weary lids. But with Bhuvanewari Mâtâ, added to the morning and evening prayer was the silent thought, the silent hope that the Lord would be merciful to her particular wish.

In Benares lived an old aunt of the family. Now it was customary in those days—as it still is—that when one living a long distance from Benares was in dire need, or in great hope that some special desire should come to pass, one made offerings and sacrifices to Shiva through relatives and friends there,

for the particular necessity. To this old aunt Bhuvaneshwari Mâtâ had recourse. She wrote a lengthy epistle to this old lady, asking her to have prayers and ceremonies made to Vireshwar Shiva, that a son might take birth in her family. The old aunt was equal to the message. Ancient with age, she managed daily to thread her way, staff in hand, from her home to the great temple with flowers and Ganges water and there offer prayers and sacrifice.

When Mâtâ Bhuvaneshwari received a letter some long weeks later, written by aged hands, informing her of the daily offerings and prayers made to Shiva in Benares, she became glad with hope. The intensity of her expression relaxed, and those who knew and loved her, saw her, as of old, the joyous mother of daughters, the proud wife of Visvanath Dutta. For even unto her dying day was this woman a queen. While other Hindu women are brought up in the thought that good manners consist in complete retirement, even to the point of shyness,—she had always been full of the fire a woman sometimes embodies, when born, as it were, to regal estate. Even in her old age was Bhuvaneshwari Mâtâ a “great lady.” Those who found themselves in her company instinctively made way for her, whether in thought or in the precedence of manners. Power and reserve characterised this Hindu woman, and in her aged days, these characteristics were stamped indelibly. There was a consciousness of superiority with her that made one feel as if he were in the presence of a *woman*, indeed a queen—and that it was a privilege to be near and be with her. She was known for her unusual readiness and tenacity of memory ; and she knew by heart, as one says, whole passages from the old Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. What worlds of thought and culture and feeling and historic and race consciousness these epics contain ! And Bhuvaneshwari Mâtâ was the master of these and of the culture, as well, to which they are the key. She was conscious of that culture as of a privilege and a blessedness. And she bequeathed this right royally to her children, as their greatest inheritance. And it was this bequest that throbbed,

in the personality, behind the race pride and the race consciousness of her son, the Swami Vivekananda.

The woman in India is the custodian of the culture. She is the vessel into which is poured the treasure of the race's outlook on life, its capacities for feeling and idealisation. Her career lies in the conscious acceptance and understanding of this as her mission ; and that is why the career of the Hindu woman is always in the domain of the feelings and why it inevitably spells character. There is religion in India for the woman in the spiritual possibilities of the domestic life. There is religion for her in the highest conception of husband and in the duties and in the divinity of motherhood,—that wondrous opportunity of giving likeness of expression and likeness of life to other souls about to come into this world. The Hindu woman is all a woman can be who has the exalted vision of the true and the spiritual womanhood.

Withal,—to return to Bhuvanewari Mâtâ, a queen amongst Indian women—she was a woman and a mother, and so the news from Benares gave her high hope. Days passed into weeks, and she was glad. Her whole soul rejoiced in the news ;—and her whole soul was in that atmosphere of constant recollectedness and her thought was fixed in holiest love for Lord Shiva. She needed no sacred city of Benares with its temples, for her own very thought was Benares ; her own very thought was the dwelling-place of Shiva, the Most High. She felt ; aye, she knew that the Lord of life would hear her prayers. She redoubled them. With what fervour she prayed ! Surely God was there in her heart ; for He is bound by the love of His devotees, as He Himself has said. Love on the part of His devotees makes Him the Fulfiller of all their desires. And even in the psychology of things, is this true ; for when the soul longs, when the great spiritual force of the self reaches out,—what, in all the universe, shall hinder it from attaining that unto which it aspires ! The faith inherent in a great desire verily removes mountains. Spiritual earnestness is the highest of all powers.

Vision follows Bhuvaneswari Mâtâ into the inmost recesses of her home and finds her in constant communion with the Lord, even while performing the humble duties of the household. Like another Mary she is, at all times, wrapt in prayer. The members of the household spoke of that time, saying that the very house radiated with ecstatic power. Of course they knew not why ; they only knew that Bhuvaneswari Mâtâ had become saintly. O nothing can limit the wonders God may bring about ! And a wonder was to be, a wonder of God's own planning—as the days revealed !

Often, often did the soul of Bhuvaneswari Mâtâ go forth longingly and in pious desire to Benares. She was present in thought while the venerable aunt poured the sacred water of the Ganges upon the emblem of the Most High, and with joy worshipped Him with flowers and Mantrams.

O if she could only be in Benares and hear the thousands murmur, "Shiva ! Shiva ! Hara ! Hara ! Mahadeva !" in recollected thought. Every bather in the flowing Ganges there is a soul in sacramental atmosphere. And there the Mother dances in the field of Shiva—which is the burning-ground. That is why He is called *Shmashâneswar* or Lord of burning-grounds. For Mother is the Destroyer as well, the Destroyer of the unreal. So the body which is the greatest superstition is Her field of destruction. And in the curling smoke which rises from the pyre, in the flames which lick the stiffened corpse to ashes, in the devouring heat She is there while Her Consort, the Lord of the Universe, is close at hand, dwelling within the Ocean of His Thought, for He dwells in Absolute Knowledge, and not in form. And the burning of the whole world could be nothing to Him !

It was He, they say, that took on the appearance of a great swan, and sailing majestically towards that point where four sages sat in meditation, began to address them upon the illusion of the world. Who were these sages, it is asked ? They had been created by Brahmâ, the Creator of the uni-

verse, to propagate the world. But by their nature, they were pure. So they were lost in meditation, sitting on the banks of the sacred lake, Manassarovar, at the foot of Kailash in the inner regions of the vast Himalayas, Lord Shiva's abode, when they were drawn out from meditation by the voice of the Lord, Who queried as to their purport. They told Him that Brahmâ had instructed them to propagate the world. Then said Shiva, "This world is a prison-house. Have nothing to do with it whatsoever!" And they heeding these words sank into Eternal Meditation and were lost to the intention of Brahmâ ; and they went unto Shiva, Who is Eternal Consciousness beyond the changes of the changing world. And Brahmâ, in his dilemma, had to create ten lesser gods to do his bidding. So runs the story.

And yet, the Destroyer of Illusion is so compassionate,—aye, He gives unto all whatsoever they ask, leading them, through the fulfilment of all lesser wishes, ever towards that goal which is the Real. Is not the story beautiful, of the low-caste hunter and the compassion of the Lord ! Lost in the forest at dead of night, he had climbed the *vilva*-tree near by to take refuge from the beasts. Thoughts came to him of his starving wife and child at home, and tears flowed from his eyes ; and they fell on the leaves which thereupon dropped, falling upon an image of Shiva which had been erected beneath the tree which is so sacred to Him. This unconscious worship had its reward. That night a black snake became the messenger of the Lord. It bit the hunter and he was released from the body, and went with the aid of the Lord's attendant spirits, into the high heaven where dwell the Sons of God. Dispute arose among the gods and crying out they said, "What hath this mortal done that he should come to this ?" And the Lord, hearing this dispute, entered into the hearts of the speakers, saying, "For he has worshipped Me with tears, and with the leaves of My *vilva*-tree he has awakened My compassion." And then the gods rejoiced, because the Lord was pleased.

Was Bhuvaneswari Mâtâ pursuing some such trend of thought concerning the Lord ! Certainly He had been in her mind every hour of the days since her vows were made of fasting, meditation, worship and of other asceticisms. Legends of Him, tales of His mercy and of His greatness ran through her mind. She found herself constantly calling on Him. Daily she had worshipped Him before His own special image with garlands of flowers and with other accustomed offerings. And all that thought had been with her for many days. All that love for the Lord which His servants know came upon her, stealing even the thought from her for which she temporarily had taken upon herself the vowed life of the ascetic, the vowed life of the servant of Shiva.

That final morning when vision was to be hers, she had been meditating upon Him as the Lord of monks. She had been thinking of Him in that ardent depth of insight when the soul sees the Lord as the Breaker of all Dreams, the Harbinger of Everlasting Things. And what is His appearance in that form ! O His form is white with ashes, even as the mighty Himalayas are white with snows ! His locks of hair are matted, and above them is the spread hood of the cobra, which serves Him for the covering of head. And the cobra is the great symbol of wisdom. And about His loins, He wears a tiger's skin, and above His head there shines, effulgent,—the new, the crescent moon ! He is mightier than the mightiest ! He has nothing ! He is everything ! In Him the worlds move ; but He is unconscious of the world in the Sublimity of His meditation. Lost, lost, lost in the abyss of His Godhead—Immovable as are the Himalayas, whose peaks rise so high above the sound of life, that they alone join in His Peace, His Bliss. Aye, He is the Essence of the Soul of man !

Evening came. She had spent the day at His shrine. Evening came and glided gently by, bringing on the depth of night. And O the wonders of that night ! Bhuvaneswari Mâtâ fell asleep. Hushed in silence was the household, hushed

in silence and in rest. Then in the highest heavens the hour struck, the time was when the soul of the saintly woman had touched the Feet of the Lord, and a wonderful compassion came over Him. And then the Lord Shiva, so she thought in her remarkable dream, came presently from the depth of His Transcendent Meditation, taking form even as her own son.

She awoke. Was the ocean of light in which she thought herself bathed but a dream ?

Shiva ! Shiva ! Lord God of monks ! Thou fulfillest in various ways the prayers of Thy devotees.



V

THE BIRTH AND NAME OF THE MASTER.

Great saints are like stars, dwelling in a firmament by themselves, above the world of ordinary life—and yet, because of their exalted height, they can be seen by all the peoples of the earth in all times. And the radiance of these great lives shines equally, in their spiritual circumference, upon all men.

It is said that the star rose in the East. That firmament is always Eastern in which the greatest stars shine forth. It was Eastern again. It may be that invisible choirs did not sing a "Gloria" at the birth of the child of Bhubaneswari Mâtâ. But certainly her heart went up to the Lord of Being in a grand "Magnificat." And she felt that the Lord had blessed her.

And there was a blessed excitement in that household, and they who had long expected this and had prayed for it were exultant in their joy. A son! A son! Truly! Happy, happy mother! Her eyes were bright with a glorious meaning and her thoughts at that moment were above the world. The long months of expectancy had met with most happy fulfilment. And she felt that she had reason to call herself blessed among women, and from her very inmost soul the joy of the spirit welled up.

O the worlds through which each mind has passed—if one looks with Emerson upon every individual as an adult at birth! The body just born,—but what timeless age of soul, what multitudes of lives behind the net-work of mind! And certainly, a great mind comes from an enormous distance in the Illimitable Past; and certainly the force born with it represents the accumulated intensity of ages upon ages of experience. O the wonder that each soul is! But the depth of the wonder of a great

soul overshadows man with awe! And one dreams of God and the verities beyond as true. Every man coming into this world has woven about him the texture of a far-reaching Past, and at bottom—if one could but see—is the same, all-unifying splendour of divinity. To become conscious of this is the work of myriad lives. Commanding then, of itself, is the spirit incarnate that has worked and lived to this end, consciously, through many life-times. There is something inscrutable in the make-up of the personality that borders upon divinity, something compelling. Reverence becomes instinctive. And even from earliest childhood are there characteristic signs and foreshadowings.

The light of the world dawned for the first time to the future Swami Vivekananda on the twelfth of January, eighteen hundred and sixty-three, several months following the vision of Bhuvaneswari Dutta at the ending of her fasts and prayers. As chance would have it, that very date was a day of universal festive rejoicing in Bengal—the last day of Paush, which is the ninth month of the Bengali year—when everybody is happy because it is heyday and one of the great festivals of Mother Ganges, the time of Makar-Sankrānti, the time of harvest, when the Indian house is renewed, when the door-sills are painted and even the animals are adorned with flowers.

It is by the light and the changes of the moon that days and dates are measured in India. That is why festivals are movable. And that is why the birthday of a boy or girl is kept according to the calendar of the moon. Just so is the fixing of the Easter-day with the West—it is an ancient inheritance from those other Orientals, the peoples of old Judæa.

Good reason was there for much heightened joy, did the people of India but know that on the last day of Paush in that year he first saw the light who should alter the destinies of the land. Now, of course, millions know and, knowing, celebrate this festive day of the birth of

him who reorganised the whole spiritual and national consciousness of Hindusthan and became the Great Apostle, another Paul, preaching unto the Gentiles of the West the gospel of another redemption—the message of Hinduism.

But he upon whom such greatness and responsibility was to fall lay as a babe in the mother's arms, content as all other babes to rest there where love is deepest, most selfless and most self-sacrificing. And he was inbreathing all the greatness of that thought the mother had dreamed so long since in profoundest worship at the Feet of Shiva—aye, and perhaps the inmost contents of that vision. And that relationship was in the making which was to be the background, with other forms of culture and experience, to that wonderful consciousness he displayed, in later times, before the greatest religious assembly the world has ever known—the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in America. For the Hindu mother's heart is the treasure-place of the nation's lore and of the nation's life. Here does the child gather, unconsciously, the association of those things which make him feel proud of being of the Hindu race whose outlook on life is far beyond its mortal forms, and whose penetration passes the realm of things earthly into the consciousness of the Spirit Itself. Here, in short, he imbibes Hinduism. 207455

And the mother treasured unto herself each and every faint reaching-out of the soul at consciousness and expression. What is deeper than the gaze of a babe? And how many things does the trained eye see in the lineaments of its countenance! Sometimes it is unspeakable age. Sometimes it is the learning of the sage. Aye, the gaze of a babe often disconcerts the wisest of men. Who can tell what the old soul may be tracing on the baby face? A babe is a babe only in its lack of expression; otherwise what gospels and what tales would it tell! Its knowledge is the simplest and yet the most wonderful in the world. But mothers are wiser than the wisest and what they see, they see with the eyes of love; and love is so deep.

Babyhood is ever only in appearance. It is the veil which the years tear, revealing the mind, the personality, the conscious being. And there are devils and there are angels—aye, and there are even gods who slumber, impotent of expression, in the mother's arms. And all the while there are great cycles of change and instinct that move in formation in the greater world of the sub-conscious self—ready, in the flowing of the years, for the new human revelation, whatever be its character or intensity in the degree. And who knows what former visions of mind, aye even of soul, are merging into the tendency which is to become the future life ! There is always the stream of the making of tendency. If one fastens attention upon the mind, adult even in the babe just born, he grows aware of the incalculable mental past. The murderer or the saint, the god or the demon is in the contrast. And in the case of the saint that is to be,—on what subtle and exalted planes does his mind move, even though the form be that of the babe ! What visions and realisations of the past is he transforming into the channels of instinctive tendency ! The nearness that was felt by his mind in former lives to God, is fixing itself for the future becoming of a powerful faculty for prayer and meditation. The aspirations of the great past of its mind are forming, in the dim consciousness of the infant, to become methods, later, of approach to the divine and of sensing the reality.

But all these things are wisely hidden from the knowledge of men. Otherwise the great order of human development would be disturbed, and too much would be known of what was to be. And many thresholds of future greatness would be closed by those who were willing to stifle the birth of redeeming events, just as Herod, the king of Judæa, would frustrate Christianity in the murderous intention he had. O the man that lurks in the child, the man that the years draw out ! Buddha, Saint Francis of Assisi, Christ, Napoleon, Nero, all these are there, in the ages, behind that infant form !

He was born a Kayastha by caste ; and the Kayasthas are second in rank of India's social body in Bengal. This was the family's caste, and it was as proud of its lineage as kings are proud of theirs. The Kayastha is a branch of the great community of Kshatriyas, which is the caste of warriors ; and all kings are of this caste.

The members of the household were surprised at the features of the new-born babe. They believed that they resembled, in so many ways, those of the grandfather, Durga Charan Dutta, of Sadhu memories. They thought, was it that the monk, having passed through the transition of death, was now come again ! And the infant grew, and the days passed into weeks and the weeks into months ; and the time came when a name had to be given him. There was speculation and much exchange of words as to the name. Some thought that it should be Durgadas after the grandfather who had renounced the world. But when they had asked the mother, she looked into the depths of the child's eyes, as if she would find out his very soul. There was a strange stillness for some moments. Then she turned to them and with much depth of feeling said, "His name ; let it be Vireswar ! So shall he be called." And those who heard this were satisfied. They knew what the mother felt. Seriousness subsided. Human thoughts and human feelings had way. He was a babe ; she was the mother ; and they were men and women in years. They called him "Bileh" for short. "Vireswar," however, was what parents call the "*Râshi-nâma*" which is determined by the constellation in which one is born. Later there is a ceremony when the name, by which the child is known to the world at large, is given. "Vireswar" became Norendra Nath, and Norendra Nath means the "Lord of the Princes of Men."

Shiva ! Shiva ! From Thy Yoga-seat in Kailash, Thou surveyest the Eternity of God. Thou Thyself art That. All in All, yet Thou chooseth for Thyself what others will not have. Casting aside the richness of the world, Thou goest garbed in ashes, caring naught for earthly things.

Indwelling in each soul as God, Thou spurnest all the treasures that follow in the wake of desire, the constant handmaiden of worldly illusion. Those who know, renounce, and thus merge in Thee. Thyself do they become. And every monk is Thine Incarnate Thought. The Great Monk is verily Thyself !



VI

THE PERIOD OF CHILDHOOD.

And there Bileh sat where his mother had put him with the cool water flowing from the tap upon his head ! He had been naughty. What a self-willed child he was ! And he would tear the family peace into shreds as often as it came to him to do so. And then the whole family would be at a loss. Those who could not stand the turmoil would flee from the scene, leaving the mother to battle with her boy. No remedies were of any avail. She did not know what to do with the child. She had scolded ; she had threatened ; she had carried out her threat, but all to no purpose. At last—a discovery, the tap and the water ! So she took her three-year-old son, dressed in his little silver chain about the waist,—he screaming at the top of his voice,—and set him down under the tap and turned the water on. Meanwhile she murmured, “Shiva ! Shiva !” And then to the family she would say, “Here I have prayed to Shiva for a son, and He has sent me one of His demons !” But this shower-bath was invariably effective. And she would threaten him, “Shiva will not let you come to Kailas if you don’t behave yourself !” And he would stop screaming and in a few minutes he would be his eager, joyous self again.

In her old age Bhuvaneswari Dutta was telling this tale to a group of disciples her son had gathered in the West ; and there was laughter, and the mother smiled in a characteristic reminiscent way. And her mind went back to other things. “Was he turbulent ?” asked one. “Well, I had to have two nurses for him constantly,” she replied.

And she told of the fancy he had for wandering monks. Whenever they would come, nothing would hold him back. Did they ask for anything, he would give it. And this often caused great embarrassment. For example,

he had just been given his first garment, a hand-embroidered *dhooti*, when a Sadhu came into the doorway with begging-bowl calling in the way wandering monks announce their approach, "Narayana Hari ! Narayana Hari !" which are the names of the Lord ! That would invariably send a shiver of delight through the child, Noren,—as he was called, because "Norendra" was so long and formal—and he would dance with glee. On this occasion the monk asked for a cloth, a *dhooti*. Noren was immediately equal to the occasion. He was proud of his new *dhooti*. It gave him prestige over the other little fellows—and he did love prestige. Off the *dhooti* went though. The Sadhu was amused. Why, it would not go even twice about his loins. But yet he accepted the offering and left with Noren's *dhooti* fashioned into a turban on his head. The family of course knew what had happened, a few minutes later. And as the result Noren had an unforgettable impression ! Thereafter close guard was kept on him. Many Sadhus came to the Dutta home. They knew that they were always welcome. The father was most hospitable. And there was with him the memory of his father, the Sadhu !

But whenever any monk put in his appearance thereafter, Noren was seized and locked up until the wanderer had taken his departure. But that did not disconcert the child. He took whatever his hands could find in the way of comfortable presents for the visitor, and threw them out of the window when the family back was turned. He would have his way—and then he would dance with excitement, turning up his nose in triumphant defiance at the family distress.

What a tease he was ! There were his two elder sisters. And elder sisters, sometimes, do not get on with their little brothers. He would tease, tease, tease ! And the sisters would be furious ; and there would be a chase. Just at the very moment when they thought that they had him and were meditating dire vengeance, he would fly to the open drain, and then grin and make faces. And he could make such hideous faces, they say ! The sisters could not approach

the drain ; that would render them unholy. But he did not care in the least for the holiness or unholiness, and would irritate them the more with his triumphant challenge of, " Catch me ! Catch me !" Play, play, play is the vision of childhood !

How endeared to the Hindu household is the gentle cow ! How many are the sweet traditions that gather about her ! Giver of milk, the drink of life, she is raised in the national estimation from the mere animal regard into a personality,—aye, even to the dignity of motherhood. And one can see any day how the Hindu woman, going afield to fetch the cow, will call, "*Esho Ma ! Esho !*" which means, "Come Mother ! Come !" And the cow puts up her ears and looks with all the love that an animal knows and comes happily in the direction of the calling voice. What spirit of tenderness this engenders ; what noble thoughts towards the animal selves ! Any day one may see cows strolling through the narrow lanes of any Hindu city and oftentimes entering the courtyards of Hindu homes, pushing their way through the partly-opened doors. Or one may see them lying comfortably upon the city-streets, or feeding from the hands of shopkeepers in the crowded bazaars. The family cow was one of the playmates of Noren. And one can see him, as it were, assisting his sisters on the festive occasion when they adorn 'mother-cow' with garlands of flowers and bow down to her. How touching are the relations of the daughters of the Hindu household with the cow, the benefactress of the home ! But Noren had other playmates in his childhood, amongst them being a monkey, a goat, a peacock and, best of all, a group of pigeons and two or three white mice. These were his comrades and he would feed them with his own hands. Thus was marked out in his early childhood and in boyhood that fondness for animals which he had unto his dying day.

Then there was the noisy rumpus through the narrow lanes. What mysteries there were on the broad street to which the lane leads ! How stealthily did he leave the premises of the house to watch the endless going-past of *garries*. The *garry* is the characteristic Indian vehicle which, in older

times, served altogether the purposes of the modern tram which has since crept in. The *garriwallaks*, the drivers, were exalted beings in Noren's mind. What great men they were ! Everybody had to deal with them ! O to be the driver of a pair of horses and to sit on the coach and flourish the whip, and to drive to mysterious corners of the city he had never seen ! Of course, there was the family-coach. He had been to see the great outside world in that, sitting on his mother's lap and busying his father with a storm of questions. "What do you want to be when you grow up, my little man ?" asked the father one day of Noren. "O a *syce*, or a coachman, father !" came the hurried response. The *syce* is the man who has the care of the horses. He wears a state-turban on his head and is so important ! Then he wears such grand livery ! O to be a *syce* or a coachman is everything ! This was the height of his ambition. Noren felt that the driver and the groom were the greatest of personages. So he was wont to make the stables his headquarters, and watch every turn of the men's duties. And how he loved horses !

The courtyard is the centre of play. Here all the tricks are devised, all the mischief is done ; and above are heard the women's voices and the bustling of the women at their work. Thus the day is spent. The Hindu child is like any other child, if anything, a little more serious, possibly because of the wonderful something which rests like solemnity all over the land. Still he is happy in childhood, and like all other children has his memories. With Noren, when he became the Swami Vivekananda, there were many reminiscences ; and he spent a very happy childhood as things go.

The family tells to this day how he would scamper away to anybody who would take him on his lap. He was one of those children who trusted all implicitly and felt with joy each moment of that period during which the world is a constant surprise.

He told in his later years how his mother had made an effort to teach him the first words of English he knew, and how he mastered the alphabet under her tutorship. At her feet, also,

he heard in these years the tales of the great ancestors of the Hindu nation which are told in the Mahabharata, and of the great war of the five Pandava brothers against their hundred cousins, that was fought so many thousand years ago. He sat and listened with eagerness, and perhaps here in the hearing he acquired that original faculty of telling a tale which was one of the peculiar traits of his genius after he had grown to ripe intellectual estate. Aye—the first education is always at the knees of the mother.

So much of the day of the Hindu is taken up with prayer and worship that it would have been, indeed, strange had Noren not been initiated in these his tenderest years into the ritual and methods of worship. In the early hours of the morning there is service to the gods—but all gods in India are aspects of the One Eternal Reality which is Brahman, the Ineffable, the Supreme. And Brahman is that Absolute Knowledge, that Absolute Existence, that Absolute Bliss which the Vedanta, the crowning philosophy of the Vedas, proclaims as the highest condition of Being.

Nor are the Hindus worshippers of mere images. How unromantic, how narrowed the vision that sees thus and criticises! In so far as even a stone is of the Divine Reality is the Hindu a worshipper. The sensing of the Presence is all a matter of a developed consciousness. Those who have not caught the spirit, verily unto them is only the form. He that resideth within all things, speaking through the mouth of that other Oriental said, "Lift the stone and thou shalt find Me; cleave the wood and there am I!" Break the image! Is it that the Divinity has been crushed! The image is the outer form. And in so far even as forms are real are the images of the gods, the forms of Brahman, divinely real. Then, too, there is heard that Voice thundering through the ages, "In whatsoever way My devotee shall call upon Me, in that very way shall I come unto him."

He comes,—every night into every home, the Lord of the universe in that very way in which He is called upon. Throughout the land the hour of evening twilight is the

hushed hour of prayer, the hour of thinking upon the Lord, and the hearts of the millions mount up as clouds of incense unto Him. Every dwelling-house is a temple and from every home one hears the thrilling sounds of conch-shells, the joyous clanging of the gongs, and the beating of the drums in praise. Silence,—then the chanting of sacred Slokas or hymns as the Rishis or the seers chanted them ages ago in the forests whence rose the song of the early Aryan.

The incense rises, and with it the perfume of the flowers : and from His tabernacle the Lord looks down upon the group of devotees. High overhead lives eternally the Spirit of That Which is One ; and for the time the unnumbered million souls of Hindusthan are caught up into This in which, above all other things, rests their unity, invincible and immovable as Death,—for this is the Spirit of God. And this essential consciousness of unity, when the soul rises above the turmoil of the world, is the consciousness of Him Who is the Silent Watcher of Things, Shiva—wrapt in the shroud of Eternal Meditation, which is the inner covering of the Flame of Soul, burning alike as One Reality in All.

VII

THE CHOICE OF GODS.

Rama and Sita ! Worlds of thought are called up with the names. Rama, the ideal king ; Sita, the ideal wife. Rama, the King-warrior Incarnation of the Lord, with Sita, pure Sita, as His Consort. These are the ideals of the domestic Hindu life. They also make up the contents of a great mysticism. Sita is the individual soul and Rama is the Lord. Rama and Sita come forth from the historic dawn of Hindu life. The story of their lives is told in the Ramayana, the great epic which the masses, as a whole, know throughout the land. Replete with wondrous characters is the Ramayana. Never was knight so hemmed in by difficulties as was Rama. Never were there greater obstacles. Never were there more powerful foes to overcome. Who knows the Ramayana knows India. Therein is told the tale of caste and custom. Therein are found all the traditions that mould the racial thought.

The image of Rama and the image of Sita ; these are the treasures of many Hindu households. The story of their lives is as Scripture to millions upon millions. Every woman prays that she may be a Sita in loving devotion to her husband. Every man holds that there is no greater manliness than was revealed by Rama, the king of strength, the prince in chivalry. And all hope to be like Hanuman, who served the needs of the Lord in His Incarnation as Rama the King, most admirably. It was he that bounded with one leap across the ocean having faith in the name of Rama and desirous to serve Him. It was he who brought news of Sita and helped Rama to bridge the ocean that his hosts might cross from India to Ceylon and rescue fair Sita from the captivity in which Ravana, the king of that land, had put her, hoping against hope that she

would yield to his wishes. The conquest was made, and Sita was again the happy wife, the happy queen of Rama. And yet even the ten-headed Ravana obtained salvation. For it is said that even the thinking of the Lord as an enemy,—because of the intensity of the thought directed against Him, even though it be evil,—is a form of meditation, and that in its greatest height, the soul of the enemy of the Lord takes wing, above all evil, unto Him.

The Ramayana thrills with the freshness of the historic dawn. One feels translated to most ancient times and to events hoary with historic age. There is the odour of green virgin forests never seen before. There is the vision of embattled Aryan hosts, making friendship with the aboriginal hordes, that dwell in undiscovered wildernesses, and in hitherto unvisited regions where everything is of surprising order and where there are giant-powers and novel things.

Noren had heard of Rama and Sita at the feet of his mother. He had followed up the long, long story of the struggle and the conquest of Rama with all the thrill of personal romantic adventure. He saw the family at worship, saw how Rama and Sita were adorned with flowers and how the elders of the house sat in meditation-posture before Their Presence, with closed eyes and concentrated thought.

It dawned upon Noren that he, too, should worship Rama. Near his house lived a Bráhmaṇ boy. One day Noren and this playfellow went with a few pice to the bazaar and, peering as high as their heads could reach above the stand on which the little figures were arranged, pointed simultaneously to a clay image of the Lord as Rama-Sita. Triumphantlly they returned to Noren's home with their purchase. Noren looked about. No one was near, and then he and the little Bráhmaṇ boy climbed the stairs that led above the ladies' quarters up to the roof. On one side of the roof was a by-room. They entered this, having first securely closed the entrance door to the



roof. The Rama-Sita image was installed by the Brâhman boy with appropriate ceremonies. Then the two sat in meditation with eyes closed to the outer world, and they meditated upon the heroic greatness of the King and of the great love of the beautiful, devoted Sita.

Hours went by. Hours of silent posture are nothing to a Hindu child. It is a racial faculty of which the West is not possessed. Meanwhile the parents of both lads noticed their prolonged absence. The ladies of both households were much upset. The male members started in search of them outside. Everywhere there was searching, but no finding. The roof, thought one! Strange that the door to it should be locked! They knocked, but there was no response! At last, the strong blows of the men smashed the latch and the door flew open. The Brâhman boy had his meditation disturbed at the first ominous signal and fled down the stairs, past the tumult of loud voices and distressed people, to his own house, finding refuge there. But Noren did not hear. The roof was searched. Not there! Surely he could not be in the by-room! Yet it would be well to see. The half-opened door was widely opened. There he was, sitting in forgottenness, discovered like another Mozart, but with the more wonderful music of thought! He was shaken from his meditation, but he insisted on being left alone to meditate upon the name and great career of Rama. So they let him remain as they found him, knowing not what to make of him, for this indeed seemed to them very strange at his age!

"Heartily know
When half-gods go—
The gods arrive."

Now comes the tale of how it came to pass that Noren thought of Rama and Sita as half-gods, and how the real God came to him. Of course, this was but a child's thought, for there was no greater devotee of Rama and Sita than he who became the Swami Vivekananda.

The all-knowing *syce* created the disturbance. Whenever young Noren desired illumination on any subject, concerning which he would rather not trouble the family heads, he fled to the stable and the *syce*. Something or another called him to the *syce's* quarters on this special day. The conversation drifted from the problem solved to other things. No one knows how the thread of talk was woven, but it drifted to marriage. The *syce* for some unknown reason denounced marriage in forcible language. At all events marriage was something intolerable to this man, and with the learning of some deep experience he told young Noren of the difficulties and supposed absurdities of married life. To be bound down, to have to deal with temperament and temper, to be the father of troublesome babes, to have to succumb to the trials of married blessedness,—the tale was so graphically told, that when the *syce* stopped his volume of verbosity, Noren, with bated breath and excited countenance, stood as if terror-struck and as if already the spectre of matrimony had come in closest approach. No, never should he be married! The free life for him! He would be a monk! He would wander all over the land of Ind when he grew up, breathing in the great freedom of the monastic life!

Rama and Sita married! Rama, the great god, tied down to such mortal ties! He had heard of the poetry of it all, but all of a sudden, the prosaic elements of that great romance came upon him. Yes, he had been often told by his mother the tale of Rama and Sita being married. He had known of their love. He had known of their adventures! He had admired their loyalty, one to the other. But the *syce* had thrown too significant a meaning over the idea of marriage. And that Rama and Sita were married—that was enough!

How are the play-thoughts of childhood and childish impulsiveness often the note of a deeper phase of things! In childhood, how many are the protestations or the sudden inclinations of instinct by which later on is measured

the great problem or the deep understanding ! Childish instincts may often be premonitions of what will in the future come to pass in the awareness of the intellectual life. The instinct is later understood as having been the subconscious sensing of fact, the subconscious classification of experience into that knowledge which shall some day burst upon consciousness as clear conviction. So it was to be in this case. Not to be ensnared in the tumult of sense, not to be caught in the bondage of sentiment, was unconsciously the dominant note in the outburst of Noren. Ever should the soul be free ! Freedom from bondage however sweet, was the unconscious quest !

Noren wandered to the ladies' quarters. Tears were in his eyes. One of the golden dreams of childhood was broken. O the dreams of childhood that are broken ! Poorer than the man whose wealth has been seized is the mind of a child when bereft of its earliest ideals. The mother saw his tears and inquired what made him sad. There was silence,—and then a sobbing aloud. She gathered him up in her arms as in the days of his babyhood. She pressed him to her heart. She and her boy were alone. All was still and quiet. The boy had told his mother the full tale of his disillusion. Then, as light bursts after the darkness, came to the mind of Bhuvaneswari Dutta the thought of Shiva. She addressed her little son not as Noren but as Vireswar, and said, "There is Shiva to worship !"

Shortly after, Noren left that silent room. Unseen in the fast approaching night, he climbed the stairs to the roof. Overhead was the splendid canopy of the Indian stars. He stole across the floor of the roof. He opened the door of the by-room where he had been that very morning, seated in meditation. He sighed for a single moment and then, with triumph on his face, he seized the clay image of Rama-Sita and smashed it into bits on the road below.

The next day saw him wandering alone to the bazaar to buy an image of Shiva. His mother had given him the necessary pice. He pointed at once to an image of Shiva,

as He is in His Reality, plunged in an Abyss of Meditation, and it was given to him. An hour later—and it was enthroned on the very spot whence Rama and Sita had been dethroned ; and he was seated before Shiva, with eyes closed to all outer things, in the depth of meditation.

Two images there were, one the meditating God, the other, the meditating child ! And in the intensity of that childish meditation, who knows—the two may have become One !

Shiva ! Shiva ! Thine own do come to Thee ! Across the ocean of the world they sail as ships, proudly conscious of their destination, unto Thee ! All shall come to Thee ! But there are those who reach Thee in the stretch, and with the speed, of thought !

Shiva ! Shiva ! Shiva ! Thou art the Real ; Thou art the Real ! From the Unreal lead us unto Thee !



VIII

IN THE DEEPS OF MEDITATION.

To sound the depths of the soul—that is the aim of meditation ! What worlds lie at the end of the microscope ; what worlds at the end of the telescope ! What worlds of insight and illumination may lie at the very threshold of consciousness !

Man is acquainted with the external world. The *outside* is his reality. He stops in wonder at the extent of things. Is there, however, not an inner order of life ? Are there not heights and depths of inward realities ? Are there not fathomless and abysmal orders of the spiritual consciousness ?

Idealism conditions everything *within*. It gives the diagram of the universe as mental. But mysticism sets itself to a deeper task. It plunges consciousness into normally inconceivable states and unfolds unto the soul the possibilities in the direction of the expansion of consciousness. It lays claim to this : that if the soul looks deeper and more intensely into itself, worlds upon worlds of inner, and of innermost reality come to view in the unfolding processes of the personal illumination. The mightiest objective things are lost in that final consciousness when man stands on the border land of reality, gazing across the shoreless ocean of the Soul.

World-dreams arise that man has dreamt in all the magnitude of the conception. Immortality—the idea itself,—is of the very profundity of thought. Then there is the invincible consciousness of the soul ; the knowledge of the Deathless and of the Indestructible within. The world is an idea, so they say. If this is true then, indeed, the elaboration of the mind will create or destroy a thousand worlds, for even a thousand worlds are relative to the Soul which perceives them.

A veil of consciousness may separate such different worlds as that of the poetic and the commonplace. The artist and the labourer see the same sunset, but with what a different state of awareness! Who knows, therefore, but that in the development of the mystical consciousness universes of experience might reveal themselves which are unknown to him whose sole interests lie in material things. In the expansion of consciousness even the Beatific Vision itself can be had,—and in this the Immensities and the Eternities are lost in the Consciousness of God.

Meditation is old, very old. The mystics of the West were all geniuses in this respect. But in India the knowledge has been ancient, most ancient. Here the meditation has been set to psychological formulæ. So, say the sages, and in this manner must the mind proceed, following first this, then that method of discipline. All the psychological accompaniments of the mystical state have been classified and brought to a crowning synthesis. And the way through the world of illusion was found in that intense consciousness when all the faculties were directed to the same purpose,—and that purpose the realisation of God.

Long, long were the ages of experiment. Dim were the beginnings when doubt was rife and knowledge small. Then, often madness came upon those who strove. Nevertheless, in the course of the ages, and by reason of the accumulated experience of innumerable souls, the end was attained. The mind is brought back to those venerable days when the forest was the school of the saints, and when Scriptures were handed down by word of mouth, from a generation of masters to a generation of disciples.

The mighty hunter knew the tracks that led through the wilderness of forests upon forests, remote from the capitals of kings and the noise of great assemblies of men. Here was the abode, the hermitage of those whose consciousness fathomed the truths of the Scriptures of Hinduism, that have flowed perpetually down the ages, from spiritual father to spiritual son. The fire is lighted. The teacher is seated

ashen-clad before it. This is the great fire of which all religions dream and which, in a sameness of symbolic meaning, the vestal virgins kept alight in ancient Rome. About him, as the radii about a circle's centre, are the group of disciples. Some of them are old, having renounced the world and forgotten it years ago. Some, though old, are young in their renunciation. Some, though young, have known no other life. Here they live, reared in the company of the blessed.

One of these, young in years yet old in renunciation, arises and, as if addressing all the blessed Sages of the past as well as those before him, even as if addressing those great souls invisible, who dwell on the highest planes, cries out, "Hear ye children of Immortal Bliss ! Even those that reside in the higher spheres ! I have found the Ancient One Who is beyond all darkness, all delusion. Knowing Him alone, ye shall be saved from death over and over again !" Who is this Ancient One ? He is the Indestructible Self in whom all the worlds are contained, who regards the world as illusion and rests in bliss unlimited, and in endless consciousness and everlasting knowledge within the Fathomless Reality of Himself !

Here is the challenge to all illusion ! The Self-discovered soul has made the retreat from the external to the innermost inwardness. And of that it is said in the Scriptures, "The Self-existing One pierced the openings of the senses : For this reason a man looks outside the Self and not within. There were the wisest ones, however, and they, meditating, escaped from death. These looked innermost within themselves and found that Self." Again, "Looking outward fools pursue the outward course, whipped by outward longings, and they fall into the all-pervading trap of death. On the contrary, the wisest ones, thinking of that Deathlessness, desire nothing in the realm of things below." This is the essence of the meditation that leads to that incommunicable state, past speech, of whose reality no thought can take form. It is That the Sages seek, and which men dream of in knowledge.

Flowing in a perpetual stream there is the long, continuous and ineffable realisation of the saints. This is the imperishable treasure of Hindusthan—the bequest of spiritual realities by the Rishis to the people. This is the very basis of Hindu spiritual lore, the foundation-ground even of its social life,—the mystical consciousness of the saints and sages. For in custom there is seen the attempt at preservation. Every wandering monk has this high state woven about him by the earnestness of his own soul, by the love of the people and by their capacity for spiritual idealism. For this reason is he the king of men ; for this reason is every monk the fulfilment of Hindu striving, the apex of the social and spiritual aspiration of the multitudes. For this reason is the home of the householder open to the monk as shelter for food and comfort. For this reason is the monk the hero of the nursery tale ;—for the monk is the embodiment, the personification of the ideals of the people, and his is the mystical consciousness.

And for this reason young Noren knew all about the monks, and how they meditated,—but the reason why he especially loved the monastic atmosphere is inscrutable. It might have been woven with the past of his personality in the profundities of that æon-old mind which was his, bearing here and there the newness of the form, knowing here and there the mysteries of soul and having gazed oftentimes through the experience of death into the Glorious Beyond.

"What is this ?" asked the mother in excitement. "Why Noren, what are you up to ?" The child was nude except for a narrow strip of pink-coloured cloth. He had run joyously to the family circle and to his mother's knees, proud and triumphant, crying out in glee, "I am Shiva ! Look, I am Shiva !" This is the manner in which those monks are dressed who have almost forgotten that the body exists. The elders of the household had told him, in fun, that if one meditated, his hair would become as long and as matted as that of the monks. He had looked

with delight upon the knotted mass of hair which is fashioned so artistically, that from a distance one thinks it is a head-gear. And the naïvity of him—he had put on the narrow strip of cloth that the great ascetic monks wear, and had been meditating to make his hair grow long and matted. That is, he had been sitting with one leg crossed above the other as he saw the family sit when at worship, and just as the monk sits in meditation. He had folded his hands, closed his eyes and he had tried to regulate his breathing just as the elders did, breathing in as long as he could, then retaining the breath as long as possible, and then seeing how slowly he could breathe it out again. At the end of an hour, or maybe longer, the thought of his hair came to him. Had it grown ! Maybe it was a great knot by this time ! He thought that he would feel it ! He did so. No ! There was no mass of hair. So he ran in childish bewilderment to learn the reason why, and yet he was joyous because he knew how much surprise his strange costume would excite.

He told his tale ; the mother consoled him in the best way she knew, telling him that it would take many, many days, yes, many, many months before the matted knots of hair could be grown. Then the talk drifted to many, many things. It turned to the Shiva-image he had bought a few days before. He said that, while he had sat before the image that morning, the thought of his mother's words had come to him so forcibly, that he had been sent away from the real Shiva because he had been naughty. Reincarnation is accepted, unconsciously, as a fact by every Hindu child. So he added, "I think that I have been a Sadhu once. Will Shiva let me come back to Him if I am good ?" The mother answered, "Yes." But her heart sank while she thought, that perhaps he, like his grandfather, would return to Shiva, but she banished the thought. There were many years yet before he could grow up into that discrimination when he would feel all the joys of the world as an intolerable burden, knowing joy only in the thought of God

Somehow or other, thereafter, the family often found little Noren playing at meditation. They saw him absorbed. What could be the contents of his mind ? It was not so very strange to find him sitting for a long time quietly. With Noren it was not a mere fixity of body, a languorous restfulness, an indomitable patience, for he would try, in his childish way, to keep his thought upon the Lord Shiva. He succeeded ; and there were times when those grew grave who shook him from that state back into the normal condition of a child. For it grew more and more difficult to rouse him from his thought. Was it play ! Or was it meditation ! He was only a child ! Yet, many a monk would envy such an accomplishment, such fixity of thought upon the Lord !

Dead to the outside ! The world is gone ! Only thought is alive, and that the highest ; and on the wings of highest thought the soul speeds into Reality ! Such are the possibilities, such the realities of the highest meditation !

The race dreams in the child, but with Noren the dream was almost an awakened reality. The seriousness of the race, its high philosophical outlook, which later on possessed his entire life, were characteristically foreshadowed in the play of this Hindu child. It is not wonderful. When the race is perfect, the childhood of the race will then dream perfectly ; it will play perfectly. There are some features of childhood which already betoken that state. Now and then they arise as prodigies. Was the Indian race dreaming perfect dreams in this child's mind ! At all events he later shook the foundations of the world and remodelled Hinduism as few others have done, in the history of the Past, in the direction of spiritual things. The play of this child, the race's dream within him, rose in later times to great levels of thought. On a future occasion all the potentialities of that dream became reality for him. The tumult of the world had become silence to his hearing. On the broad wings of meditation he, while living, burst the bonds of limitations and, soaring high above all thought, sped

fast into that Illumination which is the Presence of the Real.

From the Effulgence of that Illumination he borrowed a refracted light which found concrete form in the message of the Modern Gospel. That given, he sped anew, as do all saints who leave this world, unto the Blessedness of the world of Eternal Meditation.



IX

THE VISION OF THE LUMINOUS FIGURE.

O the things that the saints see which others see not ! O the world into which they have been born ! No wonder the monk is glad to die, so to speak, to earthly things, to leave off the family name and family ties and be re-born as a child of reality with another name, a name that makes one remember God. And the ancient Rishis, desiring to bind in fast and indissoluble ties the body of society with the higher thought, instituted the custom that even every layman must have a name of God.

Often has the vision of the saint been that of Light. Some have realised God as Infinite Effulgence.

Noren's nights were strange nights, indeed. Strange beyond words was the manner in which he was ushered into sleep. What is sleep ? The total absorption of man into Self, or is it that, the body deserted, the soul moves on subtler planes of being ? What of the dream-state ? Is the awakened state only a certain portion of the sleep-state intensified, even as personality may be only a point of condensation on the surface of the Infinite Ocean of Consciousness ? Is the awakened state also a dream-state ? Aye, it is all a dream ; all states are dream-states ; the outer world is not so different from the dream-world. There are times when the latter seems even more real. There are other times, too, when the dreamer dreams that he is dreaming. O to have that consciousness intensified so as to cover the entire dream of life ! To be aware of life as a dream ! But this is the business of the saints.

Noren has been told to retire to bed. He has done so. Drowsiness has come upon him. The outer things are faint and undefined. The brain receives its impressions stupidly. Then it comes—the light, a *Jyoti*, a great ball of light,

being kicked, as it were, by a boy and speeding towards the drowsy Noren. The mind turns its attention instinctively to this and the body falls into sleep. The sleeping boy plunges into the light. The ball of light and himself become one ! Whither has he gone ? Where is he ? Every night the same occurrence. Strange,—but not to him. Nightly he curled himself up in a comfortable position on his bed and drowsiness overtook him. Then the light appeared. He became one with it and was lost in sleep. He never mentioned this, however, until long after, and that to a school-mate who had been his companion for several years. He asked him, “Do you see a light, a *Jyoti*, when you go to sleep ?” The boy answered in the negative. “What, don’t you see it every night ? It comes from a distance, as if kicked by a boy down a long avenue of light. Then, when it comes just between the eyebrows, you,—you go into it and then fall asleep ?” “Why, no, Noren !” came the flurried response. The other boy did not know what to make of his questioner. What was the matter with Noren ? He had heard something of the sort about certain great souls but, of course, he did not associate Noren with such wise ones. But boys are not serious, and it was soon forgotten. Play erases all serious impressions.

There was some one else, however, who put this question to Noren in later years, “Noren, my boy, do you see a light, a *Jyoti*, whenever you go to sleep ?” The questioner was his spiritual teacher. This will be heard of, again, later on. At all events, until his tenth year Noren had no idea that his sleep differed from any other person’s. Everybody, he imagined, went to sleep in the same strange manner that he did. This condition of sleep accompanied him until the end, although in the latter part of his life it was not so frequent or intense.

Light ! What is it ? The maker of the conditions for life ; perhaps it is life. Without it there is darkness and chaos ; and the first mandate of God was, “Let there be light !” And there was light ! It is ever associated with

the true, with the beautiful, with the good. It arises as the companion to aspiration, becoming the Flame. Light and knowledge are always conterminous in the thought of the saint. There is the expression with regard to new knowledge, "Light has been thrown on the subject." What is dark, unknown, dead, absent, becomes luminous, known, alive and present with the bursting of the effulgence of light. Light has been associated with the intellect as illumination. The domain of the intellect is the domain of illumination. The senses are in the dark ; therefore are their impressions erroneous. The light of the intellect dispels the darkness, and a new world dawns. The "patines of bright gold" which are the splendours of the firmament become suns of the first magnitude. A drop of water becomes an ocean of life with the light of knowledge. Radiance is of the soul ; and radiance is God. Thus has He been conceived of by the world. Thus have the Scriptures of the nations described Him. The Incarnate God is the Light of the world. Thus it has always been that Light is to the saints the symbol of Truth everlasting. Thus it is that Radiance is God. God is the Ocean of Radiance. There have been saints who have said, when asked to define God as they knew Him, "He is Light ! Boundless Light ! A Shoreless Sea of Light !"

Noren, when he became the Swami Vivekananda, often described God in this way. It may be because he had seen this Light in the days of his childhood. Years after, one who had become his brother-monk, begged him to show him, if he could, that Radiance of Divinity of which he was so conscious. The monk says, to this day, that when the Swami Vivekananda touched him on his forehead the whole external world of things changed, and in its place was the Ocean of Radiance of which the saints speak.

This is the result of meditation, the seeing of effulgence. With Noren this light coming to him in his early boyhood bespoke hosts of things. It told, assuredly, of a great spiritual past when the soul knew how to steep itself deep

into the waters of meditation. It proved that meditation, which is so much a part of consciousness in the striving of the monk, had become an instinct with him. Yes, he might play at meditation as a child,—for this, the greatest achievement,—concentration of thought upon the Most High—had become as play to him.

The Scriptures of Hinduism say that all worthy things, and all knowledge are the fruit of meditation. Of course, the quality of the meditation and the character of the knowledge that comes altogether depend on the object. The highest meditation is the meditation upon God. That is why the monk, the saint, is the most perfect of beings. His life is a meditation upon God, and from that meditation, verily comes the Realisation of the Most High.

Life itself is meditation—a prolonged meditation, but with most it is the meditation of the lesser self upon minor realities. The life of the saint is a great meditation. Were it not for those interruptions that one is subject to by reason of being possessed of a body, his would be a steadfast, deep and immutable consciousness of God. As it is, in meditation the soul is in divine ecstasy while the body is held in intensity of suspense. In that exalted state what novel readings of sound and colour might take place ! What bewilderment of beauty may come upon one and what glorious confusion of sense ! How have the psychologists pondered upon this and, as the result, how have some gone with the mystics in declaring that the world is of the Self that perceives it,—the Self being real !

Evelyn Underhill, in her remarkable book "Mysticism" gathers together, as a reflection upon this, a beautiful collection of thoughts : "The late Professor James once suggested as a useful exercise for young idealists a consideration of the changes which would be worked in our ordinary world if the various branches of our receiving instruments happened to exchange duties ; if, for instance, we heard all colours and saw all sounds. Such a remark as this throws a sudden light on the strange and apparently insane statements of the

visionary Saint-Martin, 'I heard flowers that sounded and saw notes that shone' ; and on the reports of certain other mystics concerning a rare moment of consciousness in which the senses are fused into a single and ineffable act of perception ; and colour and sound are known as aspects of the same thing."

Wonderful is that world of meditation in which such displacements of the ordinary world come to the mystic. He makes little of these, however, keeping his vision fixed unalterably on God. She continues, "Since music is but an interpretation of certain vibrations undertaken by the ear, and colour an interpretation of other vibrations performed by the eye, all this is less mad than it seems. Were such an alteration of our senses to take place the world would still be sending us the same messages—that strange unknown world from which, on this hypothesis, we are hermetically sealed—but we should have interpreted them differently. Beauty would still be ours, though speaking another tongue. The bird's song would then strike our retina as a pageant of colour : we should see all the magical tones of the wind, hear as a great fugue the repeated and harmonised greens of the forest, the cadences of stormy skies. Did we realise how slight an adjustment of our own organs is needed to initiate us into such a world, we should perhaps be less contemptuous of those mystics who tell us that they apprehended the Absolute as 'heavenly music' or 'Uncreated Light,' less fanatical in our determination to make the 'real and solid world of common sense' the only standard of reality." The glories and rhapsodies of the inner world to which meditation is the key, are past the understanding of those who take for real only that which the senses happen to assimilate. Better are they who keep to the vision of the intellect, less the prey of the will-o'-the-wisp of things. Those have the Seership who have gone to the Soul as the true Knower.

Young Noren played at meditation in those days. On the intensity of inner thought, though it was play, deep spiritual feelings were awakened. He would have the boys

of the neighbourhood play with him, and they imitated him in covering themselves with loin-cloths and with ashes.

There was a certain evening when play became strange. They had seated themselves in meditation posture in the worship-hall. The meditation began. Then one noticed a great cobra gliding along the stone-paved floor. He could not contain himself. With a shout he announced the new-comer. Others sprang to their feet in terror. Noren remained there, lost in meditation. His friends called, but no response. Terrorised, they fled to the guardians of the lad. These came in haste. What horror was theirs when they saw a cobra with its hood spread, as if strangely fascinated ! And overhead was the crescent moon that had already risen. They were afraid to call out, lest they disturbed the snake and, angered, it might strike. Suddenly the cobra glided away. A moment later—it could be nowhere found. When his parents inquired, Noren said, "I knew nothing of the snake or anything. I was feeling inexpressible *Anandam*." And *Anandam* is bliss ! And the cobra and the crescent moon and the state of meditation—these are in the Vision of Shiva !

Not long after this, so Noren told when he had become the Swami Vivekananda, he sat in meditation, absorbed. Suddenly, light burst upon him. He had often seen the light, but on this occasion, suddenly from the effulgence stood forth a form divine with a staff and sacred water-vessel that monks are wont to carry in hand. Upon the countenance was ineffable peace. It gazed at him for a moment ; then it seemed about to speak. But an overwhelming awe, a divine fear came upon Noren and he fled from that place. What was this ? Whose was this shining form ? It was the luminous figure of the Buddha, as he in later life believed it to be. At other times he made frequent efforts to call back that shining form, realising that he had been foolish in his fear. But it never came—was it because the luminous figure of the Incarnation had merged in the very Buddha-like nature of himself !

X

DEDICATED TO SARASWATI.

Five or six years pass as five or six days in the counting up of life. Noren wandered along to the *pāthsālā*, the old-fashioned Indian school, at the age of six, a mat under his arm—for each child brought his own *āsana* or sitting-mat. From his waist dangled the little reed pen held fast by the long string. He was in a “brand new” *dhooti* and felt himself, as do all boys, very superior. And the little fellows with whom he played but who were not so privileged as to go to school, regarded him as important.

But schools are often strange places and one is apt to meet with strange comrades. No wonder, then, that after a few days' achievements he had an array of language that quite upset the family's sense of propriety. Never again, determined all the household, should he go to school. He must give it up. Instead, a private tutor was engaged. Noren felt no compunctions of conscience, however, and it was only when his father had instructed him that he had committed wrong, that he forgot, at least by word of mouth, what he had so precociously assimilated in his few days' attendance at the *pāthsālā*. It was a novelty—that school; and there was regret at the thought that it was all over. New acquaintances, the teacher, the fun of writing figures on palm-leaves with ink made from charred rice crushed; all this, he thought, was gone. It was terrible. Still, there was no need for too much grief. Probably there would be some new surprises in his relationship with the private tutor; then, too, his father had spoken of having some of his playmates who were relations study with him.

That first day at school had been an important one for him. Early in the day, before he went to school, the priest of the family had called him for the ceremony that is per-

formed when a boy first goes to school. All the family were present and Noren felt quite overwhelmed. After the recitation of a few prayers, and the dedication of the lad to Saraswati, who is the presiding goddess of learning, the priest took the right hand of Noren, putting into it a piece of black chalk and then guiding it, wrote out upon the ground the first letters of the alphabet saying, "This is *ka*, this is *kha*," and Noren repeated after him, "This is *ka*, this is *kha*."

All along his family found him most amenable to kindness, but infuriated by harsh words. Severe treatment made him worse and more restless. This was true of his life at school as well. The tone in which he was addressed changed his attitude at once. Even in later life this was so. Gentle words always won him over. Otherwise he was as irresistible as a tempest at sea.

Noren was the leader among his fellows. Even at that early age he asserted himself as master. Whenever the occasion offered he put himself at the head. It was the last day of *Paush*, that day on which he was born, and it was also the holiday when all the boys worship Mother Ganges and the people think it most auspicious to bathe in the sacred waters.

The boy insisted that this festival should accordingly be celebrated. He begged his father for permission and for the necessary expenses, which were granted. The private tutor, or as he was called the *Guru Mahāshaya*, was instructed by the father to teach the boys, whom Noren had gathered as his companions in the celebration, the songs that are sung to the glory of Mother Ganges. On the appointed day the long procession of little fellows headed by Noren, left the Dutta home and marching with flying standards, and with garlands of flowers in their hands went the length of the streets to the Ganges side. All the while they were singing with Noren for leader, and when they reached the River they sang that song which all Hindu children know so well, "Worship the Mother Ganges," and then threw their garlands of flowers upon the flowing waters. That evening they again repaired to the River, and making *impromptu* boats out of the layers of

banana stems, fastened at their prows the lights of reverence. What a pretty sight ! All along the river there were these play-boats. Noren's was only one of many parties ; and all along for miles the Mother's waters were lighted by the love of the children.

Memory was the chief faculty of Noren's mind in this school period. The boy had a peculiar way with him of closing his eyes and sitting motionless when in attendance at the classes. The private tutor who had been engaged did not understand this peculiarity in his charge, at first. At last he became quite provoked. What was the boy but a dunce who slept while the lessons were being taught ! There were the other boys, as well, who were the classmates of Noren ; some were cousins of his and others the children of the friends of his father. All met with the favour of the tutor but Noren. Patience gave way finally and the teacher caught hold of his pupil shaking him rudely, as if to arouse him from his constant somnolence. Noren opened his eyes in wounded surprise. He listened to the angry words of his tutor. Then, in self-defence, he recited word for word the whole text that had been read the hour before. This caused such great astonishment that ever afterwards the tutor regarded his pupil with something akin to admiration, for never had he, in his long acquaintance with boys, found such a genius for memory.

At night Noren slept under the protecting presence of an old relative, who was much learned in Sanskrit lore. This man thought that the wisest method of training the mind and character of youth was through the memorising of difficult intellectual subjects. Every night, therefore, he taught the boy several verses of the Amarakosa, which is a thesaurus of Sanskrit. In those evenings he read by candle-light the first beginnings of that life to which Sanskrit learning is the open door. This went on for months. In a year's time Noren had mastered a considerable portion of its contents. It might have been this training in his early boyhood that gave him that wonderful passion for Sanskrit learning and

wonderfull knowledge in this respect which he possessed in his later years. Certainly this was one of the formative elements towards it.

The Sanskrit language is the classic language of Hinduism. It had its being long before any historic date of which there is knowledge. The Vedas, the Scriptures of Hinduism, which are the oldest writings in the world, are written in Sanskrit characters. The language was dead in its popular form long before the days of Buddha, in the sixth century before the Christian era. It was only with the learned even in that day. To-day it is regarded as the basis of the national life, for it contains the literature of Hinduism. In later times, the Swami Vivekananda acquired the consciousness of the need of such conservation of language and culture, and became the ardent champion of the revival of the language and of the culture it represents and preserves.

Indissolubly connected with the national life of Hinduism is the assemblage of the traditions and the learning which the Sanskrit language conserves. Whoever masters the language, masters the spirit of Hinduism to a large extent. How necessary that the language be common knowledge among the people throughout the land ! What unity and what consciousness of unity it implies ! This is of the soul of the people. From north to south and throughout the breadth of Hindusthan this is the underlying current of its vitality,—this and the spirituality of the Hindu outlook on life. Should these ever go into the paths of forgottenness, then, indeed, all hope would be at an end. The Sanskrit language is the root, the mother-tongue of all the dialects spoken in India. It is thus the ubiquitous racial unit. It is thus one of the synthetic elements for the conservation of the culture ; it is thus the embodiment of the national spirit.

It was fortunate for Noren that he studied under one to whom the learning of this tongue was as a religious acquirement. Grammar and religion are closely related in India. Indeed the father of the grammarian classic is looked upon as a sage. In India the goddess of learning is the guide to

the consciousness beyond all learning. The solemn utterances of the greatest knowledge are as child's lisping compared to the consciousness of absolute reality. Saraswati is, indeed, a form of the Mother of the Universe Herself.

How many are the elements which go to the make-up of the Hindu character ! How deep are they, as well ! The appearance deceives. What to the West is learning only, is to this land the very thought by which one speeds to God. It is all unconscious—the process of the unfoldment of that which is the Hindu consciousness. The earliest impressions of sense are associated with thoughts beyond their scope, thoughts of great truths and of realities that are super-sensuous and divine.

And in Saraswati there is seen the same deification of thought and learning as characterised the worship of the Muses in ancient Greece. Running as the string in a necklace of pearls is here in India the religious consciousness amid all mortal things. As in Greece of old here are ever the presiding Gods and Goddesses. To them must worship be ere a task be commenced. Their invocation brings about success. Thus is the lad led to the Feet of Saraswati before he utters the first letters of the alphabet which is the key to learning. Because of this one reads in the opening paragraph of the Upanishads, which are the essence of the gospel of Hinduism, the invocation to the seers and to the Gods and to the Divinity Most High.

Coupled with the birth of learning is the necessity of personal austerity. For the goddess of learning in India gives only of the wealth of thought. In this She is so distinct from the character of Lakshmi, who is the giver of material riches. These two,—Saraswati and Lakshmi, though both are forms of Her in Whose keeping is the movement of the universe,—are stationed as opposite to each other as are the poles. For Lakshmi unravels the thread-ball of sense, while Saraswati draws inward and to a centre the threaded strings of sense, making these serve the purposes of Mind. Saraswati is the Minerva of Hinduism and She brooks

no loud noise of sense within the sacred precincts of Her shrine.

But there are other thoughts. Higher than Saraswati reigns the Soul and She is only the guiding-star upon the paths of Soul. So that in the Upanishads though one reads the invocations to the Gods and to the Great Protectors of the worlds, still there sounds above the chant of all minor invocations, the grand theme of the Highest Self.



XI

PLAY DAYS : AN ACCIDENT.

Acknowledged as the leader wherever he went in the course of his life, the peer among his contemporaries, the prince of the disciples who sat at the Feet of his Master in early manhood, the chief thinker later on in the intellectual circles of East and West, Noren was also the king among his playmates. His playfellows thought him the all-in-all of their little world. Wonderful are the relations between play-days and life. The Napoleon of the play-days of childhood is likely to be a Napoleon in the serious affairs of later life.

There is something that binds the playmates of childhood in pleasant bondage and in ready obedience where the great are concerned. Instinctively do they gather about themselves the company of those who become the instruments of their will. What was so surprising in the particular instance of Noren was the fact that the playfellows of his early life, who visited his home in his boyhood days, likewise visited the home he built in the years of his manhood, along the Ganges side, the monastery of the order of the monks of Ramakrishna near Calcutta at Belur.

He was the 'king' in play. "I am the Samrât, the king of kings," shouted Noren as he scampered to the highest step of the stairs, that led from the ground-floor of the courtyard to the great *pūja*-hall, and sat himself down as the lord of men. Pointing to the steps below, he told two of his fellows to stand before him as Prime Minister and Commander-in-chief. Lower on the stairs he bade five others stand as tributary princes. To his courtiers he gave the privilege of sitting one step lower than the princes. He then formally opened his *darbar*. One by one the princes, the higher officials of state and the courtiers prostrated

themselves in Oriental fashion, lengthwise before the Imperial Presence, addressing him as the son of Solar splendours, the lord of lands and seas and the protector of Dharma. The ceremony over, the king enquired of the welfare of his realm and listened to the grievances of his subjects. A criminal was then brought before him, and the grave accusations against him being proved, His Majesty exclaimed, "Off with his head ! Ho ! Guards !" Ten lads, who had been commissioned as guards, sprang upon the offender. But he, unwilling to surrender, sped to the entrance door of the Dutta home and a wild chase ensued. It was past the noon hour and the whole house was rudely roused from a pleasant siesta. The servants over whose prostrate forms the boys had tumbled were most irritated, and gave chase to the fleeing crowd of notables, but returned defeated in the chase by the swift-running lads. But Noren stood his ground, eyeing them triumphantly. What could they do ? He was the lord of the house.

There used to come to Noren's house many clients of his father. They were of various castes. They sat together chatting with each other until their turn for consultation came. Each one held his own *hooka*, or Oriental pipe. Only in the excited exchange of thought and in the volume of ascending smoke were they one. In one corner was a Mohammedan who eyed the rest with something resembling compassion. He took no part in the conversation. Only here and there was his silence broken and then it was always the same words and in the same tone, as if he were tired of living, "Allah be praised ! Allah be praised ! There is no God but Allah !" Here he puffed at the *hooka*—and then, in accents as though a world's woe rested on his shoulders, "And Mohammed is His Prophet !" And then another long, gurgling puff ! The others of different castes and creeds dropped the conversation at this, as though it had been a heavy weight. Silence, and then there were excited puffings from seven or eight *hookas*—and clouds of smoke ! Again the conversation was raised to excitement and then

anew, "Allah be praised ! Allah be praised !" and with the note of praise went up a long, loud patient yawn.

In came Noren with his body bare, except for a *dhooti* around his waist. "O Noren ! Noren !" they cried. And from the end of the room came a voice broken with gurglings of the *hooka*, "O Allah ! It is thou, lad ! Come hither !" Noren went gladly. The Mohammedan was a staunch friend and one of the well-known clients of Noren's father. Whenever he came he piled the parlour cushions about him and, resting like a Nawab amongst them, smoked his *hooka* forgetful of all earthly things. But Noren he loved, and Noren's entrance always called him from his *hooka* reverie.

In India everybody sits comfortably on the floor. In houses of the rank of Noren's father there were grand carpet-cloths, soft and inviting. There was an array of great cushions upon which to rest luxuriously. There were *hooka*-stands, chased in silver and *hookas* of all descriptions and for all castes and creeds. There were also magnificent *goorh-goorhis*, with tube-stems attached of such length that one could sit or lie down at a distance of several feet from it and smoke. This is of the luxury of the Orient.

Noren sat close to his Mohammedan "uncle," as he was wont to call him, and listened eagerly to the long, long stories of caravan trips with camels and elephants through the plains of the Punjab to Afghanistan. There was no end to the tale-telling. Such adventures and such long journeys ! "Take me with you," said Noren. "To be sure," answered the follower of Mohammed. "When you grow just one inch taller," he would say. Noren felt that he had grown any number of inches taller since he knew this Moslem "uncle." But he rejoiced in the futurity of the promise and he always loved this strange "uncle" of his.

The others, they of Noren's belief and of various castes, looked on appalled. Here was Noren breaking caste and eating *sandesh*, which is a delicious sweet, from the Moslem's hands. "Horrors ! Horrors !" thought the others

and puffed more profusely. Then the father entered. He smiled at the wry faces that were turned at the Mohammedan and at the looks of severe criticism that were directed to his son. He was a man who laughed at all caste and loved all creeds.

Noren scampered off to play when the business began. Every house in India is home and office at one and the same time. The business of the law went on in the parlour of Noren's house. Then all the clients would leave for their respective homes, in their *gurries* that waited in the lane. The father would accompany them to the front entrance. Noren would take advantage of their absence to go into the parlour and try the *hookas* of the separate castes and creeds. But the Mohammedan's *hooka* was his favourite. There was something special in the perfumed flavour of the tobacco in it, he thought.

Caste was a mystery to Noren. Why should one not eat with any other? What would happen if one did? Would the roof of the house fall upon him? Would he suddenly die? He wondered and then boldly ran the circle of *hooka*-stems through his lad's mouth and took a whiff from each and every one of them. No, he was not dead! The world had not crumbled because he had done so. Everything was quite the same and so was he. Just then his father entered. "What are you doing, my boy?" questioned the father. "O father, why, I was trying to see what would happen if I broke caste!" The father laughed heartily, and with a knowing countenance walked into his private study.

Again, in the play-pranks of childhood was foretold the seriousness of later age. Even then in the childishness of those early days was he the breaker of caste, but not rudely, or as a reformer, but just as a boy. When reprimanded as to this, he would say, "I cannot understand what difference it can make." He had not the caste-consciousness. He believed, in later life, that any change of custom that India, as a whole, must make in order that the ancient spirit of Hindusthan be equal to its modern needs, must come organically and

from within. It must be the result of enlarged vision and not of prejudicial and fanatical reform,—not through denunciation, but through a healthy and normal change.

On another day, the guests and clients were assembled in the parlour. The perfumed smoke from the *hookas* scaled to the ceiling in gorgeous circles of great clouds. Noren had had his conversation with his Moslem "uncle" and had gone back to play a game of hide-and-seek. There was a lot of happy boys at play. In the parlour, even the Moslem had bestirred himself and joined in the conversation which chanced to be about Akbar's times. Akbar, that Grand Mogul, who was the seer of an Indian nation, composed of the amalgamation of castes into tribes and of tribes into national wholes, with which should be united the assembly of the Moslem peoples. He died before it could be accomplished, and the difficulties were enormous. Both the Moslem and the Hindus in the parlour of Noren's father were lauding the tendency the Emperor had to renounce all power and take to the monastic life. They also spoke of the memory that followed Akbar by which he knew that in a past life he had been a monk, but through some failing had to be born as a king's son, for so the monks are born into the world sometimes. Their penances, in their previous life as monk, raise them above the fortune of the ordinary man.

A piercing scream ! The whole house was in commotion. The playfellows of Noren were crying aloud for help. Noren had missed his footing and fallen from the upper floor down the long flight of stairs. He had been searching for a hiding playmate on the upper floor. Not finding him he had run in excitement, but had stumbled, missing his footing, and fallen headlong down the stairs. He lay at the bottom, unconscious. His mother had run to the scene, and his father jumped up, at the first cry, from his business and rushed to the foot of the stairs. The clients were anxious. Noren was injured ! He was carried up the stairs into the inner rooms. Here he was nursed by his mother and his sisters. The father was frantic. Doctors were called.

There was infinite relief when it was known an hour or so later that it was not a fatal injury. As the result, however, Noren bore throughout his life a scar just above his right eye.

The sage who was his teacher in later life said of this, "Had Noren's powers not been checked by this accident he would have shattered the world !" As it was, he raised the world !

—noren—

XII

SOME CHARACTERISTICS : A PROPHECY.

Noren grew in grace as he grew in years, as the old saying goes. At the passing of his boyhood into youth he revealed some characteristics that marked him out among the others. Though he was in his school days he was by no means unlearned in deep things. He had been trained, as all Hindu children are, *before* they go to school to learn the rudiments of the arts and sciences of Western learning. He knew passages of great length from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and was proficient, for a child, in his own tongue. Often the singers who wander in the streets of Calcutta with their instruments and their special role of songs, stopped at Noren's home and would sing for a pice or two, or a handful of rice. Some of them who worshipped the warrior-God Rama, sang His praises in verse from the Ramayana. Noren listened with rapt attention. He loved singers. On a certain occasion a party of singers came and sang, making, however, several mistakes in the repetition of the text. Noren stopped them and pointed out their errors. They were surprised to find how well he knew the stanzas in which they specialised. They were greatly pleased and purchased sweetmeats for him, and wished that he could join their party, but of course that was out of the question.

That Noren was so familiar with stanzas and Slokas from the Ramayana was of little wonder, for Rama, in the lad's earlier years, had been, as was seen, the idol of his heart; and the story is told how at that time he was so enamoured of Hanumân, the marvellous Monkey-Servant of the Lord, marvellous for his doings, but marvellous far more for his wonderful love for the Lord Rama, that made him the King of *bhaktas*. The lad desired to see Hanumân.

He was told, accordingly, that he could do this by meditating upon the famous Servant of the Lord. In those earnest days of childhood he would run anywhere to hear the chanting of the Ramayana. He would chant and sing with the chanting and the singing until his whole frame was shaken with the ecstasy of song, and he would dance and dance with the joyous and devout shouting-out of "Rama ! Rama ! Jaya Raja Rama ! Rama ! Rama ! Jaya Sita Rama !" And he would lose himself and becoming dead as it were to all the noise and trouble of this weary world he would live with the heroes of the great epic. It was in one of these moods that on a certain occasion he went to hear the recital of the Ramayana by *kathakas*, in the course of which he heard from the venerable narrator that Hanumân lived in plantain-groves. Noren who was anxious to see the Monkey-God asked, "Can I see Hanumân there ?" And the *kathaka* told him, to satisfy his childish—or perhaps it was spiritual—curiosity, "Yes, my child, you may do so." On his way back he remembered a plantain-grove near his home. He at once made his way there, sat down under a plantain tree and prayed Hanumân to show himself to him. He sat and sat and sat ; and he meditated, and meditated, and meditated, but Hanumân did not come. He was bitterly disappointed. And they told him, at home, in order to solace him, "Noren, dear ! Hanumân more than likely has gone forth to-day on some errant mission of the Lord." That quieted him. In after life, when he was the great Sannyâsin, Swamiji spoke of this with much joyous remembrance, but he also spoke very much and seriously of Hanumân Mahâvira, and those hearing would be transported and would cry out the name of the Monkey-God ; and it was his intention in those great days of his life to erect a stone image of the God somewhere in the monastery grounds at Belur.

Fascinating are the singers that sing in the city streets. Sometimes they come in large parties ; it may be as a family who are in straitened circumstances. But they are always joyous. Some carry with them an image of the

Mother. Or it may be that a father will come with his boy dressed as Sri Krishna, with silver anklets ringing as he dances to the song, while the father sings in a deep basso, beating time on the tom-tom. From house to house they go, singing joyously. Beggars though they are in appearance, in the ecstasy which they arouse, they have a great hold on the spiritual sense of the people. Often and often they came to Noren's house and his mother always bade them welcome, for his sake.

It was an intimate education into the Hindu consciousness that was thus afforded to Noren. He delighted in it and spent a large part of his time reading the stories that the singers told in song. His mother encouraged him in these pursuits, realising that the more a child is initiated into the national culture, the better and the truer man does he become ; and also that he becomes a servant in the cause of the preservation of such culture.

During the first days of Noren's attendance at the Metropolitan Institution the father dressed him in trousers, but he tore them everyday owing to his restless habits. He was unusual in his restlessness, and they say of him that in school he never managed to really sit at his desk. It was a sort of compromise between sitting and standing with much exchange of posture. He was the boy among them all, in all things. When he played, he played furiously. The games were marbles, jumping, running, boxing. He was first in play, and it was left to him to arrange the play-programme for the following day. Disputes often arose as they do among boys, and it was to Noren that the disputants came as to a court of arbitration. He disliked quarrelling ; above all, he could not bear a coming to blows. Did such a climax occur he would rush between the contending parties, oftentimes at the risk of getting the blows of both opponents upon himself ; but he was master of the situation, for he knew boxing, even at this early age.

Withal, he was a "dare-devil," as he himself expressed it in his own way to a disciple of his in later years, saying,

"From my very boyhood I am a dare-devil ; otherwise could I have attempted to make a tour round the world, almost without a penny in my pocket ?"

He was kindness itself to those whom he loved among his playfellows. There was often strenuous argument amongst them as to whom he loved most, each believing that he, particularly, was most beloved. Was anyone hurt or ill in a party he had taken for a boyish excursion, he would give up the prospect of fun, to attend to the injured lad. Such an instance occurred when he went with twenty or more boys to see the Calcutta Fort. One of the party complained of much pain. The others joined in a merry laugh at the sick lad's expense. They went on ahead, but the boy sat down on the ground ; his pain grew worse. Noren had gone on with the party, but suddenly he turned saying, "It may be that he is seriously ill. You boys run on. One of us must go back to him. So I will go." He retraced his steps just in time. The boy had been seriously attacked with the raging fever that so often comes upon one in the tropics. He assisted him, half-carrying him to a *garri* near by and accompanied him to his home. It was this spirit in Noren that made him the idol of his fellows, and so deep was the impression with most of them that they followed him as their leader in the serious affairs of his college-days, when Hinduism was inundated by the tides of so-called reform that threatened to sweep away the very structure of Hindu civilisation. They thought as he thought ; they did as he did.

At this time he also saved a child and its mother from being run over by a carriage and seriously injured. Hastily snatching the child in one hand he pulled the mother out of danger with the other.

Kindness he inherited from both his father and mother, but there is one special instance in which his mother, **Bhuvaneswari Mâtâ**, exhibited remarkable generosity, showing the character and the intensity of this tendency as inherited by her son. Noren's father had transferred to his

wife a mortgage on a house belonging to a Mussulman family who had been hard-pressed for money. When the time for paying off the mortgage came, the elders of the Mussulman family were at a loss to procure the money for the purpose and feared a foreclosure. They were in great distress, and starvation threatened them. They told their tale to Bhuvaneswari Mâtâ. She listened calmly. Then without any comment on her action she straightway handed over to them the mortgage deed and cancelled their debt.

These two traits, restlessness and kindness, were amongst the prevailing characteristics of Noren's family and of Noren himself. They continued to be so until the end of his life. It was a restlessness that was expressive of the tendency he had, later, to see and travel, and gather all possible information and experience. It was a spirited, eager restlessness. Restlessness is also the natural outcome of the ideal of the monk. His is a great spiritual restlessness. The wandering monk must not stay in one place longer than three days, lest attachment for it may arise within his heart. Restlessness, with Noren, was always the constant effort to be saved from sameness of surroundings and from monotony of circumstance ; it was an effort to be saved from sameness of ideas and, generally put, from stagnation of any sort. His two brothers, much younger than himself, have seen the world because of this characteristic family restlessness, and his brother, Mohendra, wandered from London to Constantinople, and thence to Jerusalem and Persia, coming to his native land by way of the Persian Gulf.

It was this same spirit which made Noren's father a wanderer, as it were. He would often leave Calcutta. When Noren was some fourteen years of age his father had gone to Raipur in the Central Provinces. Thither the family soon followed, and Noren spent about two years in that distant place. His father would leave without any explanation, but whensoever his family came to him, or he returned to his Calcutta home, he was ever the loving parent and husband. While in Raipur though Noren did not attend school, he

nevertheless busied himself with the gathering of much information, sitting at the feet of his father, who was well learned in the ways of the world, and who was, above all other things, a man of many ideas. These Noren assimilated, both consciously and unconsciously. Hot discussions often took place between the father and son, and Noren did not mind opposing his father if he thought he was in the right. Sometimes the father won and sometimes the son. The mother felt gladdened at heart when the latter was the case.

Kindness continued to be one of the chief qualities of Noren throughout. From the financial remunerations he received in the West as a lecturer on India, and from the gifts that were offered to him by his disciples he gave right and left to the needy and the poor. Many are the tales that are told to this day of his personal charities.

Soon after his entrance into the Metropolitan Institution at the age of seven he was told that he would have to learn the English language. He was unwilling to do so. It was a foreign language, he said, so why should one learn it? Why should one not, first of all, become master of his own tongue, he thought. He would not learn it. He persisted. He went home crying to his father and mother. They said it was necessary. Then a friend of Noren's family, of whom Noren was especially fond, heard of his obstinacy in refusing to study the foreign language. This old man was the father of Ramchandra Dutta, who introduced Noren, in later years, to Bhagavân Sri Ramakrishna. The old man took Noren aside and talked quietly to him, but to no purpose. It was only after several months that he followed his advice and studied English; but then he studied it with an earnestness that surprised everyone. It was the English language in which he was to give his message to the West, yes, and in greater part even to India herself. He became the master of English. This was needed, imperatively. For was he not to be the spirit incarnate of a new period! His words in this language have since become a new gospel. The language served him the purpose of voicing that which he was, the centre of a

spiritual world-impulse. Without it his life would not have been that of the Swami Vivekananda.

There were those who saw marks of his future greatness even at this time. In the year 1869, Kali Prasad Dutta, Noren's grand-uncle and the head of the Dutta house, lay on his death-bed. When he found that he was to live but a few hours more, he called in his whole family, and then asked any one of the children to read to him passages from that great epic, the Mahabharata, so that his soul could pass on to another sphere with the thoughts therein contained. All were disinclined to do so on account of shyness except Noren and one of his sisters. Noren took up the heavy volume, and placing it on his lap turned page after page of the great story while his voice, loud and clear, rang with the glories of the heroes and the Lord. He was reading that particular portion where Garuda flew off with his mother Vinatâ on his shoulders,—which is, spiritually, the symbol of the soul rising on the wings of knowledge to blessedness. The breathing of Kali Prasad became slower and slower. Then he spoke in an undertone,—and yet with all the burning certainty of vision that the dying sometimes show,—“Child, you have a great future before you.” Having uttered these words his soul passed out into higher spheres on the image of that thought which symbolised the freedom of the soul from bondage. And the words of the dying man have been fulfilled. Noren not only carved out a great future for himself, but for India and the world as well, through the grandeur of his spiritual message.

Those who are to change the thought of the world as did Plato and as did Aristotle, they who are to change the destinies of the world as did Alexander and Cæsar—are from their childhood, aware of power; from their childhood they are instinctively aware of the greatness which is to come. Noren who changed the destinies of India and the thought of the Western Hemisphere to a great extent, felt the spirit of greatness within him even from

childhood. He felt power. He saw things to which others of his age were blind. It was within him. He felt already, in the feeble and yet certain ways of a child, the struggle which was to be his for expression. This accounted for that restlessness which was one of the charms of his personality, and which is inevitably a characteristic of the great. But at the same time he was steady in his practice of meditation. Much intenser than the joy of play was that *ānandam* or bliss he experienced at the time of meditation. Visions continued to be with him. Amongst other things, the light that he saw in the moments before he entered sleep he saw also in the state of meditation, but at first minutely, as one sees the light of a fire-fly. Afterwards he saw a *jyoti*, a cloud of light, proceeding from a mass of light until it became an intense illumination, rectangular in shape. This corresponds to the mystical triangle of Indian, Egyptian and Christian symbolism in the centre of which is the "eye", the outward sign of the inner vision when one perceives the reality and the spiritual essence of things.

Fixed in meditation the spiritual consciousness ascends and ascends, freeing itself from all falseness of thought and falseness of sense, ultimately becoming aware, within itself, of the Highest Consciousness or God.

XIII

OTHER DAYS AND AN HOUR OF TRIAL.

At the Metropolitan Institution Noren was still the boy. Many stories are extant of him with regard to this period that reveal him full of force and vitality, eager in play and diligent in boyish delights. Like all other lads he played pranks and called his class-mates and friends by nicknames, preferring the short and characteristic epithets of his own imaginative faculty to their dignified proper names. He had also gathered some of the more appropriate names from story-books and fables, and from various other sources.

Noren was still the devout admirer of the mendicant monks. Wherever he found one, whenever he saw one it was a moment of pleasure for him. He anticipated the Sadhu's desires as far as he could, if the meeting took place at his home. And the monks always blessed him, for his eyes spoke volumes, and it is in the eyes that the monks see the soul reflected. The desire to be himself a monk had never left Noren. He always thought of the time when he should be free to follow that life, and in his boyish excitement he would tell his friends what he would do and whither he would travel and so on, until he became radiant in his own enthusiasm, making others about him as eagerly anxious to see through his perspective the glories and the brightness of the monastic life. Often he questioned a newcomer to the Metropolitan Institution as to whether there was an ancestor, more particularly, a grandfather in the family who had adopted the Sannyâsin's life. If there had been any one in their family who had renounced the world he would regard the new lad with especial favour. Sometimes the boys would gather together and in play attempt to read one another's palms, thereby to forecast the future. Noren was the palmist of them all. He said to them that he would be a Sadhu. There

was no mistake about it. "Seel" he would remark triumphantly, "There is the sure sign of a Sannyâsin !" And he would point certain lines on his hand which an old man had told him were characteristic of the tendency to Sadhuhood. The others were eager to learn their fate in this respect. All of them wanted to be Sannyâsins because Noren would be one. But they were disappointed, as fate would have it.

Then there would be long conversations as to what constituted the Sadhu's life. They would romance and romance about it. They would build air-castles upon air-castles through the vividness of their boyish imagination. Noren contended that the superior Sadhus dwelt in the regions of the trackless Himalayas, and that these could always see the Lord, Shiva Mahadev, the Great God of monks, living in the Silence of His Soul. Those who wanted to become Sannyâsins, he told them, must go to these sages and, worshipping them, ask to be initiated into their exalted consciousness. And then, said Noren, they would make the applicant lie on a long bamboo and, could he sleep on it, they would initiate him as an ochre-robed Sannyâsin. O the fancies of childhood ! O the dreams of a boy ! And yet there is truth in it all, for though the test of the bamboo be all a myth still it is suggestive to those of a richer and deeper understanding of the truth, that only those are fit to be monks who have transcended the binding consciousness of body. Only those are monks to whom both heat and cold are one and the same, to whom even life and death are one and the same. Noren said, "These great Sadhus sit bolt upright like the images of Shiva. Nothing daunts them." The conversation would end with a song in praise of the Lord of monks.

To the house of a certain friend of his, Noren would often have recourse, as to a refuge from the monotonous moments that occur even to boys. There was a favourite tree from which Noren loved to dangle, head downwards, feet upwards, and less of the heat of the noon-day sun. This was a *Champak* tree the flowers of which are a special favourite of Shiva and which Hindu boys will go a long,

long way to secure. It was the flowers of this tree that Noren loved. One day as he was swinging from the tree, the old and nearly blind grandfather of the house came to Noren, whose voice he knew and loved so well. And because of his uneasiness about the danger of the boy's climbing that tree and also for fear of losing his flowers he told Noren that he must not climb that special tree. Noren asked the reason for not climbing this particular tree. The old man answered, "Because there is a *Brahmadaitya*, a ghost of a Brāhman, in that tree, and at night he goes about, dressed all in white, and he is terrible to look upon." This was strange news to Noren who wanted to know what else this ghost could do besides wandering about, and the old man rejoined, "And he can break the necks of those who climb the tree." Noren said nothing. The old man went away smiling to himself in triumph. As soon as he had gone some distance Noren climbed the tree again just to spite the ghost of the Brāhman. His friend remonstrated, "Surely the *Brahmadaitya* will catch you and break your neck." Noren laughed heartily at the seriousness of the other. "What a silly fellow you are!" he said. "Don't believe everything just because some one tells you so and so! Why, my neck would have been off long before this if the old grandfather's ghost story were true!"

Only a child's story is this. It happens to many a child. But what is surprising is the answer Noren made to the remark of his friend, telling him not to believe everything, "just because someone tells you so and so!" There is a serious echo to this boyish philosophy in the insight and the utterance of a much later day when the Swami Vivekananda told to large audiences and also to his disciples, "Do not believe a thing because you read it in a book! Do not believe a thing because another has said it is so! Find out the truth for yourself! That is realisation!" Truly, not belief, but realisation was the core of his teaching.

The father of this boy friend of Noren's loved him very much and had great hopes of his future. On one occasion

finding him dangling from the "forbidden" tree he called him into the house and asked, "Do you play all day going from one house to another? Do you ever read?" Noren answered, "Sir, I both read and play." Then Noren was put to the test. He was examined in geography, mathematics, and made to recite poems, to the surprise of the strenuous examiner, for Noren acquitted himself well. Then the questioner blessed Noren and asked him, "Who is there to guide you, my son? Your father is in Lahore." Yes, his father had gone into the extreme north of India on some pressing business. Noren assured the father of his friend that he read in the morning and that his mother directed him. And the former, though he said little of the matter for fear of flattering him, saw the greatness of Noren's intellect at once. Thereafter he watched the career of Noren with the keenest interest and saw the whole perspective of the fulfilment of what he had predicted, "My boy, you will be a man among men! I give you my blessings."

Another delightful story is told of him. When he was in his eleventh year, a British man-of-war visited the port of Calcutta. Noren's friends urged him to try and secure a pass for them all to go over the dreadnought. To get the pass it was necessary to see the *Bara-sahib*, the chief English official. When Noren put in his appearance, the attendant at the door told him to go about his business and that he was altogether too young to go on board a war-ship. Noren looked dismayed. Then his face suddenly lighted up. He saw a staircase to the rear which he thought might lead to the *Bara-sahib's* office. Stealthily he made his way up these stairs, pushed aside a curtain and found that he was in the right room. He made his way into the crowd. It came to his turn. He laid his own application and that of his friends before the official, and he readily signed it. As he left the room he went out by the regular way and passed the door-keeper. The latter was amazed. "How did you get in?" he queried. "O I know magic!" Noren said, and looked at him with malicious and triumphant delight.

He was a boy in every way. He played as other boys played. He felt as other boys felt. Only in the solitude does one see him as he is, when he rises to exalted things, beyond the normal consciousness of childhood, in the state of meditation, or when he addresses and worships the wandering monk, or when he goes into transports of boyish enthusiasm over the vision of the Sannyâsin life. In these things the boy was father to the man. Otherwise he was assertive and pronounced in all his actions and the chief element presiding over his personality was the spirit of an indomitable independence.

The mind follows him almost in reverence to his mother's feet, in whom he saw intensely the ideal all Hindus must see,—the Divine Mother incarnate as She is in every form of mother and in all the acts and in all the love of motherhood. This is an unforgettable vision with the disciples of the Master. He was so ardently, in later years, the worshipper and devotee of the Great Mother of the Universe, because he had seen something of Her in the worship at his own mother's feet. In India, a son is always a son. Even before he is a man, even before he is a husband, is he son of his mother.

His mother was always the confidante of Noren. There were many trying times in his boyhood, but never was there a more difficult experience than that he had one morning in the class-room. Those were days when corporal punishment was meted out to the offender, however slight his offence. It was not only a custom in India, but in all lands. Now it is no longer permitted, but in each case where it has been stopped, it was because of some unusually brutal attack upon a child. That it was put a stop to in the Metropolitan Institution was because, amongst other things, Noren was made to suffer in a manner most uncalled for. A boy in the class, whose curious personality was a source of amusement both to himself and to his fellows, was naughty in the class and was severely taken to task. Instead of being overwhelmed, he broke out into a fit of

laughter. The others could not restrain themselves. Noren was the nearest to the teacher and the latter turned his increased anger upon him, beating him upon the head and pulling his ears until one of them bled profusely. Humiliated and hurt, Noren took his books and was about to leave the class-room. At that moment Vidyāsagar Mahāshaya entered the room. He was the greatest man of his day in education. He founded several schools. He was a great scholar. He gave shape and dignity to modern Bengali literature. His name is known throughout India. He was known by the name of Vidyāsagar, which means the very ocean of learning. He was rarely addressed by the name of his family. He has become a hero to the people of Bengal, and his statue adorns a prominent place in the city of Calcutta. Vidyāsagar Mahāshaya saw the situation at a glance. He made inquiries into the system of punishment. Thereafter, all the teachers who had inflicted corporal punishment were warned, and since then corporal punishment has been unknown in that Institution. He turned upon the teacher who had beaten Noren and said, "I thought you were a man. I see you are a brute." He then consoled Noren, but the classmates of the lad were infuriated at the unjust treatment he had received. He was their idol. He was first in the class. They were at peace only when the teacher was severely reprimanded.

Even as a boy Noren was strong-minded and fearless. Before the foregoing instance, in his younger days, he had been assaulted by another teacher who thought he had made a mistake in geography. Noren insisted that he was in the right. Angered, the teacher ordered him to stretch out his hand. Noren did so and was beaten on his palm time and again. He did not murmur. Shortly after the teacher saw that it was he himself who had been in error and apologised to the boy, and thenceforth held him in respect.

On both occasions Noren went to his mother. She consoled him and said, "If you are right, my boy, what does it matter? It is unjust and unpleasant, but do what you

think is right, come what may." Noren carried out this motto to his dying day. Many times he suffered, many times he was misunderstood even by those nearest and dearest to him when he adopted a course that seemed inevitable because, in his opinion, it was right. Another motto he had learned in those days and which he also followed in life was, "Stick to your guns, dead or alive !"

His mother meant much to Noren. To his last days, even as the famous Swami Vivekananda, he repaired to his mother in her moments of depression to cheer and help her. This was right. She and her son had passed through experiences of grief and deprivation and sorrow and distress—after the passing away of his father,—of which the tale can never be told in full, unless one can reveal what direst poverty is, and the facing of misery and even of starvation. For so did it come to pass. Noren and his mother knew suffering to its bitter end. For this reason was their love for each other a blessedness and joy. Now,—beyond both the hopes and miseries of life, they are one-d in the Eternity of God.



XIV

PARENTAL GUIDANCE—A MOTHER.

Undoubtedly the parental consciousness descends upon the child in two different lines of influence. All children owe something to the father and something to the mother. It is generally an intellectual inheritance with a broadness of outlook on life which the father bequeaths. The mother's bequest is generally the moral vision and the life of the heart. This may have an intellectual bearing, however, for sometimes, particularly in the lives of great men, the moral vision becomes the support of the intellectual consciousness, indeed, at times, its very basic principle. It may be that he was referring to some such realisation when later in life, Vivekananda said once with collected thought and much pride, "I owe my intellectual life to my mother."

Simple are the words of counsel from a mother's lips. Every mother utters them, but some mothers have a greater power of intensity in the vision of character than others. Such mothers are the makers of men whom the world calls great. Their personality is a rich enforcement behind the words of their advice, which thus weighs deeper in the mind of the child.

It was the custom of Bhuvaneswari Dutta to speak to her children, as their memory recollects, in some such way as this, "Be truthful even unto death ! Be chaste ! Be always dignified and respect the feelings of others ! Do not interfere with the liberty of others ! Be gentle to the extreme, but be also firm and remain unmoved and unchanged in times of necessity." These, above all other words, were the counsel-thoughts of the mother. In brief, "To feel nobly, to think highly and to act rightly" was the moral tradition she handed down.

The sense of freedom which became the dominant note in Noren's life was developed in reflection on that portion of the mother's wish, "Do not interfere with the liberty of others!" For this reason he, as the Swami Vivekananda, let those who became his followers and disciples avail themselves of the rare privilege of developing along their own lines. He never dictated or superimposed ideas. He would confer the spirit. With that spirit they were to do as they deemed wisest. He was the apostle of freedom, not alone for himself, but for every one. He despised that special form of tyranny which is so often exercised under the name and plea of education, when ideas and ideals are propagated with special policies behind them. One sees the fountain-source of this great love for freedom in his realisation of his mother's counsel.

His mother was the concern of his heart. He would obey her unquestioningly. To his father he was deeply respectful. He revered him as a giant in intellect and a prince among the personalities of his time. But if he felt that he himself was in the right, he would oppose his father even as he opposed his spiritual teacher in the years of his early manhood. It was an opposition, however, not of will, but of thought. He fought every inch of the way in matters of vision and consciousness, and in this his father himself had initiated him.

Visvanath Dutta drew out the intellect of his son. He would hold long conversations with him upon topics that demanded depth, precision and soundness of thought. He would give the boy free intellectual rein, believing that instruction is not the super-imposition of ideas upon the mind of the child, but the stimulus to a self-awakening of thought. He believed that memory should not be the chief factor in the assimilation of culture, but a developed discrimination, a developed faculty of judgment. To his father Noren owed the capacity of grasping essentials and generalities in the field of knowledge, of seeing truth from the widest and most synthetic intellectual outlook, and,

also, of realising the groundwork of any subject under discussion. With his father's help he was enabled to comprehend fundamentals in thought, not to lose himself and his subject in the devious paths of argument and to express ideas in the simplest and in the most direct manner. From his father also he inherited the passion for history, and the love of such learning as improves the outlook on life and bears practical relations to a higher understanding of personal duties and responsibilities. Visvanath Dutta cared nothing for thought-diagrams except in so far as they were capable of being transferred into the concrete realities of life. It may have been this characteristic which compelled Noren to demand the essentials in religion instead of being satisfied with simple theological and metaphysical phases, and make realisation the burden of his message, in place of belief.

Noren's father was broad-minded, and counted friends among all classes, other than those of his own caste and creed. *Manliness* was his idea of privilege, and not caste. This Noren saw and followed. He also witnessed in his father's character a deep respect and a righteous pride for national traditions ; and in this Noren followed him as well.

Christianity was active at that time in its propaganda, and was gaining much ground. The father would often try to bring out, in the conversations with his son, a sense of contrast between it and his own faith, always demanding, however, that the sense of respect for one's own national religious tradition and culture be kept safe and intact. For what, after all, thought Visvanath Dutta, is religion but the highest conception of life, and why should one civilisation with ages of race-culture as the background of its religious outlook, change this for a creed which, in comparison, is only of yesterday ! He asked, "Are not all religions different languages for the same great thought ; are they not all visions of the same reality ? And is not its own language and vision best for a particular civilisation ?" Visvanath Dutta believed and impressed upon his son, Noren, that when a man loses faith in

his own historic past, he cannot have any self-respect, and faith in himself. He realised that conquest is not of the body, or by the sword, but in the infusion of a foreign culture. When the mind of a people is conquered, then is there conquest, in fact.

"No man was ever great who never literally worshipped his mother," Noren used to say when he had become a man of world-wide influence. Indeed, the mother in India stands first in society, above the wife, for motherhood is held more sacred than wifehood. Wifehood, it is held, is always personal, but motherhood is the abandonment of personality, the core of renunciation. The mother is the goddess of the household. Before ought else, the mother stands. Her wish is law. Glorious is the Hindu conception of wifehood. Even greater, however, is that of motherhood. So deep is the reverence for motherhood in India that, it is not strange that motherhood should have been deified. The Mother of the Universe is the highest ideal of the Personal Godhead in India. Why? Because the mother is easiest of approach. However steeped in guilt Her child may be, She is always the loving Mother. Closest of human relationships, the ideal of motherhood is also the closest in the divine relationship.

One can even become impatient with the mother, just as children do. It is not that violent impatience, however, which means uncontrollable selfishness; it is the great liberty of being quite natural and unconventional, even though the expression be in a form of impatience, by virtue of the depth and intensity of love which is between the mother and child. In India, this idea of passionate freedom in love is extended to include the relationship between God and His child. She is spiritual love, the Divine Mother, and of Her it can be said what Mohammed said of the Divine Person, "Verily My Compassion overcometh My wrath." The idea is, if one cannot be free with Her, with whom, then, shall one be free? The enormity of one's sins is covered over by the infinity of Her love. The human mother is Her earthly incarnation. She, too, forgives and forgets all the waywardness of her

child. Therefore, shall one not literally worship the mother ? She is called "Mā" the child's simple name for mother ; She, the Divine Person, is likewise called simply "Mā." O if we could realise God as Mother, what freedom with divinity, and what consequent intensity of realisation, born of this love which knows no fear, would be ours !

✓ Noren was the virtual worshipper of his mother. For his mother's sake and because of the great poverty of his family which bordered on starvation, some years later, he did not become a monk as soon as he desired, for he took care first that all should be well with her and those who depended upon her. When he had come triumphant from the West, as the Swami Vivekananda, at the climax of his public reception, he had a vision in which he saw his mother dangerously ill. His grief knew no bounds, and those who are his disciples in Madras still remember how great was his anxiety at that time, and how he would not be comforted until the telegraphic answer to his inquiry told him that all was well with her.

✓ So wonderful is the love for mother in the land of Ind that, as an instance, it is told of a certain Hindu High Court judge in the presidency of Madras how, when he lay on his death-bed, his mother, entering into the room, struck her foot and fell to the floor. Thereupon, it is said, that, sick unto death as he was, he rose from his bed upon the floor and fell prostrate at her feet, cursing fate that his illness should have been the cause of such great pain to her.

"Mother" is the invocation that rises from the soul of every son and every daughter of Hindusthan to every mother ; it is also the invocation that rises, morning and evening, unto Her Who is beyond the dream of life.

Every mother is intensely hopeful of the future of her son. With Bhuvaneswari Dutta it was not only a hope but an earnest prayer. She watched her boy's development of soul, and when the days of his childhood were over and youth came on, and youth glided on into manhood, she assured herself each day, "It must be ! It must come !" Her

dream of the Lord on that memorable night must come to pass. Were the signs forthcoming? She watched and wished and prayed. Were the passing days bringing any revelation? She watched, waiting, hoping. And it came to pass, even as she had dreamt on that memorable night and as she had expected, but not without sorrow and suffering. For to renounce her son that he might realise, in the monastic life, the consciousness of That which he was, meant much; indeed, at that time, it meant everything to her. Noren had just reached that age when the hopes of the family were high and the world beckoned him on and on with fairest promise.

His father had passed away when Noren was in his twentieth year, and the consequent distress of the family had caused him to defer his desire to enter the monastic life until a later day. Steadfastly he stood until the time came when he was no longer needed at home. Then he soared into the freedom of the monk, for years lost to name and the knowledge of others as to his whereabouts, until he emerged as a world-figure and had become the embodiment of the "Zeitgeist" of his age. His mother had seen his days of intellectual struggle, and she prayed. She had seen the days when he sat at the Feet of his Master, and she prayed still more fervently. Her very prayers meant her sorrow, for they were answered in the way that spelled renunciation to her own soul as well as his.

She saw the whole career of Noren burst into the fulness of the illumination of the Swami Vivekananda; aye, and saw his body left as a veil behind, when his soul had pierced the shadow of death into the Everlasting Consciousness of God. She stood beside the burning pyre and prayed in that tremblingness of thought which is the meeting-place of highest consciousness of truth and deepest woe and everlasting bliss, yet none of these. She stood unmoved, knowing full well that there had been no death, but victory and joy supreme of soul. The woe was of the humanity of her; but the bliss was deeper, and of the Deathlessness of God whither he had gone.

And she herself knew peace nine years later than her son, passing from the illness that followed on a pilgrimage she had made to the Temple of Juggunnath, the Lord of the Universe, at Puri, into the Silence and the Calm and Bliss wherein He dwells, the Living Reality Divine. The mortal date of her freedom from all dreams came on the twenty-fifth day of the month of July in the year nineteen hundred and eleven.

The burning-ghât was the place of illumination, and the soul of Bhuvaneswari Dutta went forth on the wings of approaching eve to meet her son in the Presence of the Lord and be crowned by Him in the Radiance of Eternal Peace forever—The Mother.



XV

FURTHER GLIMPSES OF BOYHOOD.

In his early boyhood, Noren showed a very active nature, whether in study or in play, and one of the main characteristics of play was the wild pranks which he enjoyed making upon his fellows. That in no way lessened their love for him ; on the contrary it endeared him to them all the more. As for study he manifested remarkable alacrity in preparing his lessons, one hour being sufficient for him to master his tasks. Apart from study, he would spend the whole time in devising some new sort of enjoyment. Whatever pocket-money he was allowed in those early days at the Metropolitan Institution would inevitably go for lozenges, marbles, a new bat or ball. In his earliest youth he took up cricket and became proficient therein. At this time Noren spent nine months of the year in sheer fun and applied himself strenuously to his studies only for two or three months before the examinations. He showed proficiency in English, history, and in Sanskrit, but had great distaste, at least at this time, for mathematics, and in this he was like his father who was wont to speak of mathematics as a grocer's craft. For some years during his time at the Metropolitan Institution he suffered from chronic dyspepsia and became very thin in appearance, experiencing a strong appetite for certain foods which were specially harmful. This, however, in no way depressed his nature. He was as active as ever and manifested characteristics which revealed him as possessed of sterling qualities.

One day, when about six years of age, he went in the company of a younger relative to a *Charhak* fair at which Mahadeva is worshipped, and saved the life of his companion by a sudden and bold move. He purchased some doll-images of Shiva at the fair. As they were returning and it had grown dark, the two became slightly separated in the crowd. And

at that moment a carriage came dashing along. Noren who believed his companion to be immediately behind him, turned at the noise and to his utter dismay saw, that it was a question of life and death for the little lad, who stood terrified in the middle of the road. Putting his Mahadeva dolls underneath his left arm he ran quickly to his help, heedless of his own safety, and grabbing the lad with his right hand pulled him almost from under the horses' hoofs. Those who stood about them or were walking along were wonder-struck. The incident had taken place so rapidly that there was little chance for another to have run to his assistance. Some patted him on the back while others blessed him ; and when he returned home and his mother heard the story she wept for happiness and said, "*Always be a man*, my son !" Even in these days Noren exhibited foreshadowings of that remarkable presence of mind he always possessed when, as the Swami Vivekananda, he gave out the contents of the Modern Gospel.

Another incident which occurred when he was nine or ten years old, proved him to be a "little man." One day, having made up a party for a boating excursion, he and his schoolmates hired a small boat on the Ganges and went to the Botanical Gardens. On the way there they enjoyed themselves making merry and singing at the top of their voices. At the Gardens they saw all the sights, enjoyed the walks in the park, and then, being hungry, they had luncheon, afterwards returning to the boat. One of the lads was desperately ill and, before he could rise from his seat to get the freshness of the air, became sick. The boatmen were annoyed and insisted that the lads should immediately cleanse the boat. They in their turn as strenuously insisted that they would not do so, offering instead to pay almost as much again as had been charged originally. This did not satisfy the men. It would have been only right, in the nature of things, to have pardoned or rather overlooked the incident, because anywhere along the *ghats*, some low-caste man could be procured for the purpose. And the lads were the sons of gentlemen

whilst the boatmen themselves were common people of low caste. And in India the liberty which these men took with the lads was nothing short of insolence ; it was an unpardonable offence. They were becoming more and more rude ; in the presence of the guardians of the lads they would not have dared to address them in a tone of disrespect. On reaching the *ghat* the men refused to let the boys land, and were making threatening gestures. Just then Noren espied two European soldiers walking leisurely along the river banks. Both were rather "under the weather" as the saying goes, but Noren nevertheless made up his mind to call these stalwart, kind-looking soldiers to his aid. Suddenly in the heat of the discussion, the boat made a turn, and Noren thought that he would take the risk of jumping ashore. With a dangerous leap he was on land. Immediately he ran to the soldiers, and in broken English he communicated to them his tale of woe, meanwhile putting his small hands into theirs and guiding their unsteady steps towards the scene of trouble. "All right, my boy ! All right, my boy ! Don't you worry !" said the soldiers. And then calling out to the boatmen in stentorian voices and with a mixture of English and Hindusthani, which made the language all the more formidable, they threatened the men and their boat and their lives if they did not immediately put to shore and release the lads. The men to whom the very sight of a European was in itself a sufficient cause for terror, said with panic-stricken voices, "*Achchha* Sahib ! *Bohut achchha* Sahib ! *Abhi* Sahib !" which means, "Very good, Sir ! By all means, Sir ! Immediately Sir !" With one or two sweeps of the oars the men pulled the boat to the *ghat*, whilst the soldiers glared at them ferociously and spoke their minds in telling epithets. The lads seeing who had saved them had their souls stirred alternately with glee and awe. None of them dared even to look out of the corners of their eyes at the European soldiers, and after having made their *salaams* they retreated as fast as they could to a safe distance. When they left the scene of trouble, they looked upon Noren with wide-open eyes, literally staring at him in speechless

amazement. Noren asked, "What is the matter with you, fellows?" After some moments one gained his self-consciousness sufficiently to say, "Why, how could you talk to two Sahibs and both of them drunken soldiers, at that! Who would ever have thought of doing such a thing! Perhaps they would have glared at us and something terrible would have happened to us." Anybody who has been in the Orient and understands the fear and repugnance of an unsophisticated Oriental in looking upon a "white face," will appreciate the story and also the dare-devilry and boyish courage of Noren. It was no wonder that his playmates looked upon him as a *hero*.

Besides his interest in animals in these days and in his pigeons, and white mice with their tiny bells, and his parrots with their constant cawing, Noren amused himself in making toy gas works and aerated waters, which were then newly introduced in Calcutta. He even interested himself in manufacturing toy railways and all sorts of machinery. In the words of his younger brother, "With old zinc tubes, earthen cooking-pots and straw he made his gas-house in the outer courtyard of the house; the straw when lighted gave out a peculiar smoke, but it was in his mind a miniature gas-house which lighted the whole city of Calcutta. It was amusing to see his gas works and himself as he stood with arms akimbo and gravely looked at his contrivance as the smoke issued forth. Sometimes, however, he expressed his disapproval by turning up his nose—a family peculiarity—and impatiently ordering his playmates to put more fuel on the fire, or to blow more fiercely whenever the smoke rose up too lazily.

"Though he was full of wild hobbies and always devising some new sort of games into which he threw himself with much gusto, he was the favourite of all. With every family in the locality, whether of high or of low caste, whether rich or poor, he established some sort of relationship. It is generally the custom that grown-up boys of fourteen or fifteen years are not allowed in the inner apartments of a

Hindu household where the ladies reign, but in his case this custom was waived aside. Somehow Noren made his way into the hearts of all, and various families in the neighbourhood looked upon him as belonging to themselves. Did any of the boys of the household near by suffer any bereavement he was always ready to console. Otherwise, he kept everybody amused with his ready wit and with much merry-making, sometimes, indeed, sending even the grave-minded elders into roars of laughter." Indeed his handsome appearance, his musical voice, his jolly temperament and his good taste and manners made Noren a kinsman to all with whom he came into intimate contact. As his brother further speaks of him, "He was a favourite with the ladies of the zenana whom he addressed as 'auntie' or 'big sister' according to their age. He was never shy anywhere, and made himself at home with any family ; aye, even a poor low-caste woman he addressed as 'my dear auntie' which gladdened her heart. He was a sort of life-giving spirit with everyone of the locality—and the elders loved him as dearly as they loved their own children."

Referring to another characteristic his brother says, "At this time he got the idea that he would excel all others in cookery, and so he induced his playmates to subscribe something according to their means, himself, however, generally bearing the total expense. He became the chief cook and the others were his assistants. He cooked different sorts of *Khichri* and meat-curries and other good things. Whilst the dishes were good in taste, he seasoned them with too much cayenne pepper—his favourite spice. Nevertheless, this group of gastronomers remained together for a good long time and they enjoyed it right thoroughly."

Even in these young days he showed his intellectual tendencies. When the family had moved to Raipur in the Central Provinces, in Noren's fourteenth year, many noted scholars visited his father. Noren would listen to their discussions, and occasionally he would introduce his personal views. Sometimes the elders, astonished at his cleverness,

would treat him on an equal footing. The sight of this gladdened his father's heart. With one friend of his father, a great authority in Bengali literature, Noren joined in conversation and took the man by storm by quoting verses after verses and paragraphs upon paragraphs from standard works, so much so that the man said, "My lad, we shall hear of you some day." And the prediction has become verified, for Norendra Nath Dutta, as the Swami Vivekananda, became one of the greatest authors in the Bengali language ; and not in Bengali alone, however, for his English writings have been praised, as well, both in the East and in the West as nothing short of perfect. Noren, even in his youth, sought, nay he demanded, "intellectual equality and recognition" for himself with everyone. He was exceedingly ambitious in this regard, and when any one older than himself made light of his intellect, he would break through all sense of social difference and distinction and fly into a temper, not sparing even his father's friends. For there was one time when he found himself sneered at by one much older than himself and a long-standing friend of his father. This enraged him. He thought, "How dare this man make fun of me when my own father thinks highly of me and deems me worthy of holding conversations and entering into arguments with him !" And with that his fiery temperament burst out, and he told the man what he thought of him and of such who believed that youth necessarily lacked intellectuality and mature judgment. He refused even to recognise the offender until he had apologised to him.

There was another time when Noren, dressed in European fashion, was suddenly accosted and that rather abruptly, by a Mahratta pundit. This so irritated him that he pounced upon the man, metaphorically speaking. Of course the father could not sanction such outbursts against elderly persons,—even though they proceeded from a sense of self-respect,—for in India such conduct is considered as a grave offence ; and so Noren was each time severely reprimanded, but in his heart the father was glad that

this boy was a *man*. Noren never intended to be unkind. He somehow felt that during conversations carried on by clever men he also had a right to introduce his own speculations about life. For by this time he was well read in many ways for a boy, and he felt, in contradistinction to the lads about him, that intellectually he was growing fast into manhood, even if physically he was still of tender years. His father, likewise, shared this opinion.

During this period he acquired a sense of personal dignity, and when he returned to Calcutta from Raipur he was a changed boy. He always had a large-heartedness and a great generosity, so that however his temperament might conflict with circumstances and with people, he was always loved.

There were two incidents in his youth which flattered him immensely. These were the receiving of honours and prizes, the first for physical prowess, and the second for intellectual attainments. Earlier in his youth he attended a fair at which he carried off the first prize in boxing,—a handsome silver butterfly. It was a strange coincidence that at this same fair his sister drew the first prize for needle-work on velvet. The second prize was the one he received from his own father for having successfully passed the Entrance Examination,—he being the only student of the Metropolitan Institution passing in the first division. The family was delighted at his success, and his father gave him what all boys treasure so much—a *watch*.

Another occasion which revealed the boy as the man in the making was, when about fourteen years of age he saved a theatrical performance by compelling the bailiff, who had come to arrest one of the leading actors on some charge, to wait until the end of the play. Noren had managed to slip into the theatre, as some of his relatives who were influential in the matter made it possible for him to have a chance to see. In the midst of the performance the bailiff appeared on the stage with a warrant and advanced to the actor saying, "I arrest you in the name of the

law." That very moment a voice called out, "Get off the stage! Wait until the end of the performance! What do you mean by disturbing the whole audience like this!" It was a shrill voice with an unmistakable tone of command in it,—and it was the voice of Noren. Immediately a score of voices burst out, "Get off the stage! Get off the stage!" And the bailiff retreated in bewilderment. Those about Noren patted him on the back saying, "Well done! Well done! We would have lost our money's worth had it not been for you!" It was this sort of action and this sort of spirit which made Noren the leader amongst all the lads whom he knew, a leader passionately fond of fun and mischief, in all things a boy, and in all boyish ways a *man*.

Noren was always on the alert in these days. He had learned in Raipur that old Indian game of chess, and often came out victorious in many hard contests. At this time the theatre was introduced into the social life of Bengal. And Noren immediately opened up an imitation theatrical establishment, charging one-anna entrance fee from his family and neighbours in order to pay expenses. Of course it was only an amateurish affair. He was interested in all manner of sports, knew how to operate a magic lantern, and could row and fence excellently for one of his age.

But of all his earlier attainments, music must be counted as one of the most unusual. He was taught and trained until he became widely known as a sweet singer, and he himself became infatuated with music and with song. He had a friend whose house he often visited and here, to the accompaniment of musical instruments, he practised singing. The two would take the musical instruments and make themselves merry, especially when the guardians of the boy were absent. Noren's own family was greatly charmed with his voice and he often sang to his father, now seriously, now happily as the mood guided him. His musical attainments at this time were rather striking, because he even surpassed the school master who taught him singing.

He excelled in story-telling all through his life, and even at this time he would hold his audiences of play-fellows in excited suspense, whilst he narrated to them some thrilling portion of the tale of "Ali Baba and His Forty Thieves," or some equally exciting story. Indeed, Noren was throughout a boy,—hearty, joyous, kind, spirited, possessed of a fiery temperament, intellectually ambitious, fond of song and feasts, and anxious to see or hear or experience anything new, or to master anything in the way of obstacles. He was a boy, filled with the Western spirit of restlessness, in which he differed so markedly from the temperament and easy-going habits of his fellows, and proved himself to be the father of the man who was the restless, eager, fiery, intellectual, true, and genuine monk,—the Teacher Vivekananda.



XVI

COLLEGIATE DAYS.

The play-days of childhood with their momentary joys and sorrows were over for Noren, and a new life dawned for him with a more serious outlook when he passed the matriculation examination at the age of sixteen and entered a collegiate course.

Happy, happy memories were with him now of those years he had passed at the Metropolitan Institution. His mind often reverted to the incidents of that period. He was always the first in his class. He remembered the many times that he was left in temporary charge of his class during the absence of his teacher, for ten or fifteen minutes. He recalled the fun he and his fellows had, how he pretended to be severe with them and, then, how he would reverse that attitude into one of much merriment. He remembered the playmates of this period,—and mostly by the nicknames he had given them. It was not altogether a matter of unmixed joy to him that he had succeeded in the examination, for while it meant a new prospect, it meant also the parting with many associations of which he had grown fond, and some of those companions he loved much were to be left behind. He could no longer play as schoolboys do. He could no longer play at soldiers and march as the regiments march. He could no longer scamper about. He felt all the seriousness of college-life and all the premeditated dignity with which it is surrounded. But he soon forgot the old life in the outlook of the new, and planned thenceforth for himself the serious task of real learning.

That he had passed the Entrance examination for the university course was in some ways characteristic. First, because he was the only student who succeeded in passing in the first division from the Metropolitan Institution, thus

practically saving the reputation of the school. Then, also, he succeeded so well in spite of a two years' absence from the school, when he went to Raipur in the Central Provinces in the year 1877. His father had gone there some months before; then, the family thought it best to follow. And it was a long journey partly by bullock-cart through dense forests and jungly ways, for the railroad in those days had been constructed only to Nagpur, by way of Allahabad and Jubbulpur; and so the remainder of the distance had to be covered in this primitive way, by day and night.

There are several noteworthy stories told of him at this time, but particularly one that happened on the road to Raipur when he had another of those deeper states of spiritual insight which foreshadowed the degree and the intensity of the spiritual power he exercised later as a teacher. True, he had gone into stages of meditation. He had seen visions and had been visited by many moods of the spiritual consciousness; but on this occasion it seemed as if the whole spirit of nature bore in upon him.

The party of travellers had been journeying in their bullock-carts for several days. It chanced to be perfect weather. Noren felt in uncommon ways the glorious, joyous freedom of life as it is lived out in the open. The hours of the day were passed in spiritual exercises and spiritual conversation; for in India every journey is, in one way or another, an act of pilgrimage. And the mind of the boy was occupied with religious things. Now it would be the exalted greatness of Shiva; now it would be the doings of Krishna the Child, the Spell-binder of Souls. Or it would be the tales of saints and saintly heroes; and so on and on. On the particular day of his insight, the whole time had been engaged in such ways. And the evening was being given up to song and meditation, as was the case with every evening. It was the hushed hour of twilight, after the setting of the sun. There was a wonderful silence, broken only by the last note of some home-coming bird,

the murmuring of the near-by stream, or the songs of devotees. The travellers were differently occupied ; some in song, others in silent meditation. The whole peace of life, all the silence, the stillness, the wonderful beauty and all the blessedness of nature seemed present there in the wilderness, and a certain divinity, withal, of quiescent omnipotence. Noren commenced to sing. He had forgotten the presence of the others. His voice rose with the burden of a song in praise of the Lord of the Universe. As the last word was uttered in the singing, Noren, strange to say, fell into a state, resembling the nature of deep sleep, but joy, inexpressible joy, was written on his countenance. And when he returned,—blessed, as it were, and blissful,—to the normal state of things, the night had already come, the stars were above, and surrounding the camp that had been pitched for the night was a silent and wonderful peace.

At Raipur there was no school. So Noren passed the time with his father, when the latter was free from the business of the law. It was during this time, as has been stated previously, that Noren mixed so intimately with him and caught the whole meaning of his father's intellectual consciousness. Here was an education for Noren, the privilege of intimacy with a noble mind. And it is told of Noren that in these days he would set himself to the task of deep exchange of thought between himself and others who chanced to visit his father's house. He was physically perfect at this time and had, to some extent, already acquired that splendid manner of bearing himself which amounted to a royal physical dignity, and which made him, in after years, a notable figure everywhere and on every occasion. It was during the two years' stay at Raipur, also, that he was initiated by his father into the secrets and mysteries of culinary arts. For, if anything, the Swami Vivekananda was, like his father, a very excellent cook.

The family returned to Calcutta ; and Noren was all the stronger and the better for the experience of a strange place. But there was some little difficulty as to getting

him into the Entrance class, as he had been absent from school for two years. Finally, by special permission he was admitted. Then it was that he gave himself up to study, mastering three years' work in the space of one, and finally passing the examination, triumphantly and with honour to the Institution.

When he had passed the Entrance examination, Noren had made much advance in knowledge. He knew arithmetic and something of higher mathematics. He was well versed in Sanskrit for his age. He had studied with much success the history of his own land. Now he was to take up higher branches of learning. The curriculum he had before him was an extension of the same subjects, together with the study of astronomy, of general history, of English literature and of the Western systems of philosophy. He had chosen these studies because he believed that they, best of all others, conduced to the development of the mind and to the highest refinement of the faculties of sense. His father encouraged him in this and assisted him in arriving at this conclusion.

In the beginning he attended the Presidency College, which is the government college, but he soon postponed his studies at this Institution, joining the General Assembly's Institution at the next session. It is not unlikely that he had suffered a nervous breakdown because of the strain during the time in which he prepared himself for the Entrance examination. Then, too, he had contracted malarial fever from which he suffered for one year. The General Assembly's Institution was founded by the Scottish General Missionary Board. It is now known as the Scottish Churches College. When Noren returned in triumph from the West, as the famous spiritual teacher, it was the students of this college who stopped the carriage of state in which he was driving with some of his European and Indian admirers, unharnessed the horses and drew the carriage themselves. The memory of Noren, the college boy, is still with the Institution.

For the first two years of his college life Noren concerned himself mainly with his studies. He was devoted to literature and made great headway in the arts of composition and rhetoric. He manifested a keen interest in philosophy and logic and in some forms of the higher mathematics. He grew more reserved while following these studies, discovering that his development lay along the lines of intense learning. He made great efforts in the direction of the English language and more especially in the arts of conversation and debating in which he excelled, becoming virtually the leader of the college in this regard.

At the Metropolitan Institution, he had ambitions along this very line. On a certain occasion when prizes were distributed among the deserving, and one of the teachers was about to retire, the class, of which Noren was a member, desired to give an address of thanks and appreciation for the many and loving services the teacher had rendered them. Mr. Surendra Nath Bannerjee, probably the foremost Indian of the day, was the chairman. He was known as the greatest orator, and so the students felt a righteous shyness as to speaking before such a distinguished man. They came to Noren in the emergency. He promised them that he would speak. He rose in the gathering and spoke for almost half-an-hour, telling the retiring professor how the boys felt towards him and how they regretted his departure from the Institution. When he sat down, Mr. Surendra Nath Bannerjee rose and spoke in a most praiseworthy manner of the young speaker. Later in his life this gentleman, although his reputation as an orator had grown into amazing fame, referred to the Swami Vivekananda as the greatest public speaker India had ever known. It was the tribute of one Indian genius to another.

Those who were among Noren's friends and acquaintances at college, remember him as he was, imperious and as rightly self-conscious as though royally born. He gained the admiration and good-will of both the Indian and English professors, and they referred to him as an ambitious mind

and a personality with much latent power. At the end of the first two years, he passed the first Examination in Arts. Thereafter he developed a remarkable originality in his intellectual pursuits. He would test everything by argument. Even in the hours of recreation he continued discussions that had commenced in the college hours. He would argue with those who challenged his point of view, and invariably with success. He was a lion among the students and was defiant in thought. He was vehement, vigorous, of untiring energy, and his topics of thought and conversation were endless. His mind became intensely analytical, and it was in this becoming that he subordinated imagination to the demands of the intellectual self. At this period he related himself, also, to the needs and spirit of his time. He subjected Hinduism to a severity of analysis and it will be seen later on to what this led. He demanded from everyone his individual right to belief, whatever the character of that belief ; and he was literally voracious of any information.

Let it not be imagined, however, that he was not as a lad in other things. He was as spirited for adventure as ever ; and there was another side to him that relieved the seriousness of his intellectual temperament. He was the wit among the students and the first to see the amusing side of a situation. They were a jolly lot that centred about Noren in his college life ; and when out for an excursion for fun and frolic, there was no jollier one among them than he. Many were the times when they would pack themselves into a *garri* and go singing through the streets. When it chanced to be a religious festival, they would repair to the sacred Ganges for a bath and a swim, making religion and joy matters of one and the same moment. On other public festivals they would march at night through the lighted streets, in eager pursuit of the most interesting sights and of festival-making. Noren was always the leader. He always saw to it that they had the full measure of fun and the full benefit of the occasion. They were manly

recreations in which they indulged, and in all the days of these spirited times Noren unconsciously wove about himself the threads of many warm friendships which remained with him to the end.

One of his characteristics during the college life, was a hatred of foppishness. He could not tolerate the dandy, and would speak quite openly to the fellow who made it his sole business to dress well. He disliked any tendency to effeminacy either in manners or in apparel. Another characteristic was his thoughtfulness for others. It was customary in those days for the General Assembly's Institution to help those who, for lack of funds, could not pay the required fees, but the case of the applicant had to be substantiated before he could be put on the "free" list. A friend of Noren found himself in great difficulty. He could not pay the arrears that had accumulated, nor the fee for appearing at the B. A. examination. Noren said he would see what could be done, and spoke to the secretary of the college, but without avail. He besought him again and again, but still without any hope for his friend. However, he cheered him up by saying, "Leave it to me. I assure you I shall succeed ; you go and prepare yourself for the examination." Noren thought of getting a better opportunity of pushing his request, and resolved to wait in the street where he knew that the secretary was sure to pass at a certain hour in the evening. As it happened he met him, and spoke to him with such a depth of feeling and such a threatening attitude that his request was readily granted, and the friend of Noren found himself with the opportunity of passing the university examination.

Examination days are a trial to all students in every country. In India, the trial is especially severe and unusual energy is put forth by the students, because the degree bears a financial as well as honorary advantage. The student who passes the university examinations, enjoys the probability of securing a position under the Government. A Government degree enables him also to have the advantage over applicants for other positions in the commercial world.

When the days of examination for the degree of Bachelor of Arts drew nigh, Noren retired to his maternal grandmother's home near by, because of the noise of children and other disturbances in his own house. There he confined himself for days at a time studying day and night. He took a vow to the effect that he would not leave the room until he had mastered the daily task which he had chalked out for himself. It was interesting to hear him speak to a friend, in later life, about the trials of preparation for examination. "I sat in the room," he said, "book in hand, with a pot of strong tea or coffee by my side to keep the brain from getting over-tired. When I felt inclined to sleep at night, I would tie a rope to my foot. Then, did I fall asleep and move to make myself more comfortable, the rope would jerk me, and I would awake with a start." At all events, the struggle ended in victory. Noren secured his degree. He next took up the course for Bachelorship in Law, but it will be seen how he was led to give up the honours of that degree just when they were within easy reach, because of the meeting with Sri Ramakrishna, his spiritual master, and his decision of becoming a monk.

Noren had become well-versed in music by this time. Not alone that, but he had even written an elaborate preface on the science and philosophy of Indian music, to a big book of Bengali songs. And this he did, solely to help a poor, struggling publisher. Later on in life he composed several famous songs and hymns that are now used in religious worship by the monks of the monasteries which he founded. An incident is narrated of his faculties in song.

It is a rare audience that is as appreciative of music as one composed of Bengalis. They thrill with enthusiastic response. To an Occidental who for the first time is present on an occasion of this character, the audience itself is as much of an entertainment as the singer and his songs. Frequently the students at the General Assembly's Institution gathered about Noren to hear him sing. There were

two hundred boys in a class on a certain day when the English professor chanced to be some minutes late. The young men asked Noren to while away the time with a song. He gladly responded. There was perfect silence except for the singer's voice. The professor came and hearing the song, listened before entering the room. When the song ceased, he opened the door with pleasure written on his countenance. He praised the voice of the singer, although he was not made aware of the singer's name.

There was another one, however, in later months, who became transported beyond himself into religious ecstasy by the sweetness of Noren's voice. This was Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, with whom Noren soared upon the wings of song, many and many a time, into the Region and the Peace of God.



XVII.

THE DRIFT OF TENDENCY : A DEATH.

Fling away all books, for what shall learning be in the Presence of the Lord ! So Noren felt ; so he did on the morning before his B. A. examination. The deeper self in him had arisen, had asserted itself. What is all learning if one compares it with that certainty of feeling for Reality which is born of the Love for God !

"Sitting on Thy Great Throne, O Lord of the Universe,
Thou art hearing the great song of the world

As it rises unto Thee in the cadences composed by Thee !"

Noren stood outside the rooms of some of his college-mates singing the song, absorbed in it, almost ecstatic. Happiness shone over him as a great radiance. The lads were still asleep. Hearing him they awoke and opened their doors. Noren had a book in his hand. All day, however, it remained unopened. All day he sang ; all day they listened, even until nine o'clock in the evening. Only one day was left before the examination, yet this day he spent in song. And he began singing that wonderful song whose opening verse reads,—*"We are like children, with little understanding. Shall we not rely upon Him, the Ocean of Wisdom !"* On and on the singing continued. Now it was a song of praise,—

"Sing ye, O mountains, O clouds, O great wilds !

Sing ye, sing ye His Glory !

Sing with joy all ye, the suns, and moons and stars !

Sing ye His Glory !

Conversation intervened. The young men spoke to Noren, "Have you finished your reading for the examination ?" "Of course," he replied, and then joyously burst into the text of another song,—

"O words of great hope ! I have heard them with joy !

They are of Thee, O Lord ! O the entrancing words !"

"Why not settle down to definite plans, Noren? You have a great career before you if you will only look more towards the prospects which the world holds out," said a friend. Noren met this remark with a shrug of the shoulders, and then told them all what he thought of life. He commented upon the desirability he had often felt for the greatness of worldly position, the power of wealth and the influence over men. He said that he had often desired to possess a reputation, position and a popularity such as was enjoyed, for example, by Mr. W. C. Bannerjee, the most distinguished advocate of that period. He added, however, that after long reflection he could not see the worth-whileness of the worldly side of life. Death comes and engulfs all. Why should one build up greatness to be destroyed by death!

"I have thought much of the life of the monk," Noren remarked after some time. "His is a real greatness, for he seeks to push aside the power of death. He seeks a changeless reality, while the world deals with and falls with the conditions of change." His friends listened spell-bound. However they might think otherwise, they could not resist the power of his personality, and they loved the greatness of his thought, although they could not quite understand. When he ceased, the spell broke, and one more intimate with him than the rest opened a tirade of discussion about the uselessness of the monastic life, and told Noren that he would be of no use either to himself or to others if he took upon himself the vocation of the monk. Noren smiled. He knew that the young man did not speak from conviction. It was only fear that if he adopted the wandering life of the monk, he would be lost to his friends. The speaker became more and more heated in his argument. "The trouble is," said the friend, "that Noren has met an old man who goes into trances and lives a monk's life at Dakshineswar in the grounds of the Kali-temple on the Ganges side. He is always meditating and talking about God and knows nothing about the world. This man is upsetting all of Noren's ambitions and turning his mind from worldly affairs and

ruining his future. The name of this old man is Ramakrishna. Noren, if you have any sense, give up going to see him ! It is hampering your studies, and it will ruin your whole future if you continue. You have great talents. You can attain anything if you set your will to it and if you give up going to Dakshineswar !"

Noren remained silent. He had become grave, very grave. It had not been long since he had met this saint, Sri Ramakrishna. The story of this meeting will be told later. At present it is but a glimpse one gains. Hours of conversation followed. Finally Noren arose. It was night by this time. The whole day had been spent in song and discussion. It had been a day of joy for the college-friends of Noren, because he had been with them. They were grieved, because Noren seemed so strangely silent as he arose to take leave of them. The one who spoke so tempestuously addressed Noren, "What is the matter, Noren?" Noren responded in a hurt way, "You see, you do not understand. I myself do not understand. No, even I do not understand, but I love that old man, that saint, Sri Ramakrishna." He walked from the room to his own solitary quarters at his maternal grandmother's house. His room was bare of furniture. Only a *tānpurā*, a musical instrument, could be seen, and a number of college books. Noren threw himself upon the floor and wept. After a while he sang softly. Then he sang louder and louder, until he sang himself into joy once more and into hope.

In this room Noren used to sing often between his study. There was a young widow in the house opposite to it across the lane. She oftentimes came and stood by her window, unbeknown to him, and heard him sing. On one occasion she crossed over from her own house and from her zenana quarters. In the dim light Noren saw her standing in the doorway of his room. She was young and she had come. She had seen him often without his knowledge, and bore great love for him. She had heard his singing this night. It was all romance to her. Noren was amazed. He had

never seen the girl before. He fell at her feet. "Mother ! Mother !" he exclaimed, emphasizing the word *mother*. "Why have you come ? Let me regard you as I would my own mother." The girl understood. A moment later, and Noren was alone. The next day he changed his quarters and was never seen again in that room.

A friend of Noren refers to him in a manner that gives one an insight into the nature of the feelings that all of his friends bore to Noren at this time. "It was delightful to listen to him. His voice, of itself, was as music to us," said this friend and admirer speaking for himself and the others. "We used often to open a subject for discussion just for the pleasure of hearing him. He was so interesting and above all, so original. We learned so much from listening to him. Did anyone oppose him, however, he fell upon him with all the power of thought and language, and would vanquish the opponent in no time. He was kindness itself to us. I remember one striking instance of this. Having heard that he was ill with fever, I repaired to his grandmother's house. I found him almost helpless, yet he insisted upon serving me. I was his guest, he said, and he was the host. I remonstrated but he persisted. He arose from the floor and busied himself preparing the *hookā* for me with his own hands. A servant of the family entered the room and was horrified to see Noren at this. The servant looked upon his master as a devotee looks upon a saint. To him Noren was everything, and he scolded his charge, forcing him to rest." To any but an Indian it seems surprising that a servant should be so familiar with his master, but India is strange in many more ways than one. For example, a son must look upon the servants of his parents in the same relation as he regards his elder brothers and his sisters. This servant of Noren loved him to such an extent that he forgot everything and even his position as a servant in his intense love.

Noren's light-heartedness and boyishness of spirit received a rude shock some days after the examination. He had gone about two miles from the city of Calcutta to visit

the home of a personal friend. It was night and there was much merriment. Suddenly a messenger appeared on the scene. He had run all the way from Noren's home in Simla to carry the news that fell like a clap of thunder in the midst of the friendly gathering. Noren's father had died suddenly of heart disease. The news overwhelmed Noren.

Could it be true ? he asked. He hastened at once to Calcutta. The body of his father lay in the room ready to be taken to the burning-*ghât* on a funeral cot. The mother, the sisters, the two boy brothers of Noren were wailing and weeping. They were awaiting his coming. He was the eldest, and the eldest born of the sons must perform the ceremonies accompanying the burning of the body of the father, in the liturgy of Hinduism. The procession wended its way to the *ghât*, relatives of Noren carrying the burden of the dead form. And in the early morning air the shout went up, "*Bolo Hari ! Hari bol !*" which means, "Call upon the Lord ! Call upon the Lord !" Noren was dazed. He could neither speak nor weep. And as the rice and the pice were scattered in the procession's course, he moved along, plunged in a state of utter mystification. His father dead ! Could it be true ? How he had loved him ! He looked up. It was the burning-*ghât*. There was no doubt. Then he burst into tears.

The logs of wood were piled over the ground that had been scraped away to let the ashes fall below. Whilst this was being done those present raised their hearts in prayer. But ever and again came those words of death and reality, "*Bolo Hari ! Hari Bol !*" Then came the ceremonies. The Brâhman priest dictated to Noren, and Noren repeated, that prayer which bids the soul go unto the place of the blissful forefathers and unto the abodes of blessedness and reality. Then Noren took hold of a bundle of lighted straw and set flames to the pyre. Others followed him in this. Soon the whole was a mass of flames, and in the intensity of those flames Noren read, "This is but the body that burns. Its nature is death." But

he was made aware in some unusual mood of vision which dawned upon his heart, that the soul which had sped from the form was as ever the person and character Noren knew as his father. As the flames subsided in the late morning hours, water was thrown on the coals which were left. Then these were taken and cast into the river Ganges.

Now came the days of suffering. The father had left his family very little money. From comfort Noren was suddenly thrown into the direst poverty, facing now and again, in the course of the years, even actual starvation. Later he made efforts to cover those terrible days. It was all dark to him. He alone was the support of the family now—a mother, and the rest, children, one a babe. Heavy did the clouds of fate hang over his future. The days before him were as dark as the sorrow of his heart. Who knows the time or the hour! Yet he is the MAN who meets fate, as the captain of his own soul, fearless and with power. This Noren did.

XVIII.

STRUGGLES AND HARDSHIPS.

The day of tribulation comes to all men. The period of material difficulties and physical discomfort comes, but it goes, in the case of great men, towards that welding of experience which is the making of character. Into the valley of despair, aye, even into the shadow of death do the great in soul have frequently to wander. But their greatness rises beyond the despair, and beyond the shadow of death does it soar into an illuminated character.

When Noren returned to his home after the ceremony at the burning-*ghât*, he found it the house of desolation. His father's room was just as he had left it,—but *he* was gone, never to be seen again within the enclosure of those walls. At first Noren gave way to grief. In the midst of his sorrow, however, the thought of his mother, his sisters, his boy-brother and the baby-boy came to him. Immediately he arose and went to his mother's room. The younger brother was asleep, exhausted from the night's wakening and from sadness. The mother and her daughters were silent with grief. They had wept themselves into stillness. Noren spoke to his mother. This aroused her from her reverie of woe. He spoke tenderly of the present ; he spoke hopefully of the future. The mother smiled between her tears. Yes, all they had now in the world was Noren. Noren promised that all should be well. The mother looked upon her son with pride. Yes, they would start life over again. What mattered it if they were poor, they had each other ! That was a great comfort. It consoled the mother and she arose determined to see life in a hopeful way, but as the result she bore unto her dying day the marks of that dignity that comes of pain and suffering concealed within. She was now the widow ; hers was from this day the ascetic life of vows and

renunciation ; and like all other widows, Bhuvaneswari Mâtâ succeeded in following the grand injunction of the Shastras which bids the bereft wife to dwell, by penance and by austerity and by greater and greater resignation, in that region of blessedness unto which, it is the hope of her heart, her husband must have gone.

Everything went well enough for some weeks in the household of the Duttas. But then the means of sustenance became exceedingly low. Then came the day when there was none, and Bhuvaneswari Mâtâ said to Noren, "My son, what is to be done ? There is no food !" Ah ! It had come, and terribly so,—the utmost poverty. No one knows how those days passed or how food was obtained, because the secret of it all is locked up within the memories of the mother and her son.

Noren was still studying for the degree of Bachelorship of Law, but he appeared in the college as the poorest of the poor. Did he go a long, tiresome distance, he went afoot. Sometimes *garriwallas* who had on many an occasion pleasant memories, financial and otherwise, of Noren's generosity, in other days, would insist that he must ride ; but he invariably made excuses. Those were terrible days. After some months, even shoes became a luxury to Noren ; his garments were of the coarsest cloth, and he wandered to his studies many a time without a morsel of food the whole day long. Often he became faint with hunger and weakness. His friends endeavoured to be a consolation to Noren, They invited him to their homes more frequently than before, and whenever an Indian invites one, departure is not allowed until the guest has partaken of refreshment. More than ever he was asked to have his meals elsewhere, but the irony of fate was worst at this time. He would go to visit his friends ; he would chat happily, but when food was offered to him, the spectacle of the desolation at home presented itself to his mind. He could not eat and left the house with the excuse that he had a pressing engagement elsewhere. He returned home and would eat the barest portion

of food prepared, saving the larger quantity for the others. Since his passing away from life Bhuvaneswari Mâtâ told to a chosen few the story of the sacrifices her son had made for her. Times were when he came to the house, refusing to eat on the plea that he had already eaten at the house of a friend. The fact was, he had eaten nothing, and did not want to eat at home for fear of depriving others from having a full meal. Such was the greatness and such the fineness of the man !

Nevertheless, Noren did not falter in his spirit. He tried to be his boyish, joyous self and made light of his trials to those who made inquiries. The Dutta family were proud, in a lordly way, and concealed, under the cloak of external appearances, the misery which was theirs. His friends, often sons of the wealthier families of Calcutta, drove up in magnificent carriages to Noren's home to take him for drives and pleasure-trips. They never suspected, however, that his wasting away, physically, was due to any other cause than an exaggerated grief at the loss of his father.

To make matters worse, a dispute arose with a branch of the family over the very house in which Noren and his mother lived. On some far-fetched basis a case was made out and the affair was brought into the courts. The contestants demanded that the house be partitioned, they receiving the larger and better portion of the property. This was a blow to Noren. His mother sank under it. They were to have their affairs exposed to the public. Noren braced himself for this new trial. It seemed to make him fierce with fate. He no longer commiserated with himself. Previously he had felt like a wounded animal that wants only a crevice in which to remain until the hurt abates. Now he was as a wild animal at bay. He determined to see this new evil through. He himself would settle this matter. A celebrated Barrister, Mr. W. C. Bannerjee, volunteered to see after his affairs out of the love he bore to his father. The case dragged on and on. During the trial several incidents occurred which revealed the temper, the character and the wit

of Noren. The counsel for the other side referred to him as a *chela*, trying to insinuate thereby that he was a fanatic and that his testimony ought to be judged, by this fact. "*Chela*" in India is the word signifying a disciple of a holy man ; but evidently the Barrister did not understand the term. He was a European. "Do you know, Sir, what a *chela* is?" queried Noren. "Of course I am a *chela*," he said, referring to his being a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. The judge when he knew that the young witness was a student in the law course and heard his clear and bold replies in cross-examination, said, "Young man, you will make a very good lawyer!" The case was decided greatly in favour of Noren's family. He left the court jubilant and was eager to go to his home at once. But he was stopped by the attorney on the opponent's side, who shook his hand warmly, saying, "I agree with the judge ; the law is most certainly your profession. You have my best wishes."

Noren, once in the lane leading to his home, ran as fast as he could, and opened the heavy doors that led into the courtyard. They closed with a bang. He ran across the open space. He scampered up the stairs that led to the inner apartments as he did in the days when he played hide-and-seek. He sprang with a bound into the room. "Mother ! Mother !" he cried. "The house is saved ; the house is saved !" Bhuvaneswari Mâtâ was overpowered with joy. She put her hand on her son's head and blessed him as she did in the days of his childhood ; and the two were exceedingly happy.

After that, the days passed into a slightly better fortune, but it was by no means comfortable. All along for several years it was a painful struggle. The coarsest food and the coarsest clothing were all that the family had, yet they were happy, withal, when they remembered that the home was their very own. Noren made every effort to make ends meet. He became a Freemason, hoping that the social advantages thereby to be gained, would also spell a financial opportunity for him. He became a teacher in one of Vidya-

sagar's institutions, but gave that up in a month's time for better opportunities. It was all a struggle for a hand-to-mouth existence. Never did Noren forget those terrible days. They were with him to the end, and those who are old in the family remember them to this day. It was a blow from which the family never fully recovered, for even now it is poor. There were moments when Noren had despaired, but he was too brave to show what he felt. There were moments when he felt everything coming to the saddest pass, but then he was half-starved, and one wonders that he did not throw all hope overboard in the sea of misfortune that had bewildered him, and in which he found himself and his family sinking deeper and deeper, thinking himself and those he loved lost. All his life long did Noren revert in memory to those days in the tense moments of his career when struggles and other hardships pressed upon him. It gave him strength when he remembered that he had gone successfully through other periods of stress. The bonds of relationship between mother and son were deepened a hundredfold through these tempestuous experiences. The mother herself was proud of her son and began to realise that in him, also, was that trait of character she so especially admired in his father—never, never to acknowledge defeat.

He had already met Sri Ramakrishna, his spiritual master. From this meeting, there gradually developed in his thought the desire to renounce the world, but how could he? Was ever a soul purposing to itself the monastic life so beset with adverse circumstances! It seemed as if all the gates of opportunity were closed for him in the outlook. Not even a loophole showed itself to his penetrating and anxious search. Pressed both by that internal longing to give up the world and by the days of that legal confusion, his heart sank into despair. When matters were worst he fled from it all, hastening to the Garden of Dakshineswar, where Sri Ramakrishna sat in meditation. He had run all the way. In his excitement he had dropped from his feet one of the loose slippers that are worn by Indians, and had not

noticed the loss. He came before his Master with his garments torn by the jungle brush through which he had pushed his way, cutting short the main road so as to reach there quicker. He appeared before his Master, exhausted and overcome. Throwing himself before Sri Ramakrishna, he asked, "What shall I do! What shall I do! If you have power then save me from this awful fate! It seems there is no hope." Sri Ramakrishna understood it all. He had heard the story, before this, not only from Noren, but from Noren's relatives and friends as well.

"Go, my boy," answered the saint. "Go to the Temple there and pray to Mother! She will grant you whatsoever you ask." Noren went into the Temple. When he came out he was transfigured. But the full import of that which occurred then to him must be told later—in relation to those days which he spent as the disciple. He had first to pass through a world of mental anguish before that truth came to him in the Mother's Form which, thereafter, made his life what it was and made him the Swami Vivekananda. There must be first taken into account those months of struggle of mind through doubt. For, the mind that was his, went through the full growth which inevitably implies that pain has been known which penetrates beyond the sphere of thought into the torture of the heart. Even his Master he would have to challenge, and even with him would he have to battle.

Sorrows of mind and sorrows of body were Noren's lot in the future for several years. From the time of the death of his father to that of the passing of Sri Ramakrishna and even after for some months, his life was of such fortune and circumstance that any other would have perished under it. Thereafter, when he eventually gave up the world, he adopted the life of poverty and renunciation. Following his significant experience in praying to the Mother of the Universe, at the instance of Sri Ramakrishna, though the fate of the Duttas was severe, it was never overwhelming. But until the end a bare subsistence was all that the family

of Swami Vivekananda had between themselves and want. As he could he helped his people, and helped them more, by far, than if he had remained in the world, earning a pittance for food. Aye, his family shared unconsciously in his renunciation. It partook with him of the glory and radiance he cast as a spiritual influence over the presence and the heart of the world. Two brothers of the family remain, but as they are unmarried, living for the vision of a great ideal, the line of the ancestors is threatened with extinction. Over the whole, however, is the illumination of an immortality that nothing can extinguish and that will outlive the dying of all worldly things. Though the family become extinct yet through the realisation of the Swami Vivekananda great spiritual communities have been born. Through the purity of his monastic life thousands have been re-born in soul; and this is of a birth that knows no death.

XIX

THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD.

Days of youth are days of excitement, and boys are boys, and boys are always attracted by boyish things. It is natural, for a man must not grow old before his time, And yet there are those exceptional cases where the man and the boy are one and the same, blending, to all appearances, indistinguishably. Of course, it is in the qualities of mind wherein this is foretold. After all, real manhood is not in the number of physical years which have been lived, but in the expanse of the faculties of perception, particularly in the direction of what is true. For that, after all, is the business of man. In this light, are there not children of eighty and men of fifteen years ! Sankar-acharya, the founder of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy, had reached climaxes of insight before he was twelve ; and before he passed on to final illumination at the early age of thirty-two, he had caused his influence to be scattered broadcast from the north to the south, and from the eastern to the western extremities of the Indian continent. It is true of all those who are great—the line of greatness is foretold in the consciousness of youth. Abraham Lincoln, the great American President, was a man in character and in his outlook upon life, in the early years of youth. Napoleon was in the making as the serious-minded student at Brienne. The mettle of Alexander the Great is seen in his youth. Noren, who was to preach his message at twenty-nine years of age and pass from the world before attaining his fortieth year, was of this precocious type. It is not strange, in this understanding, to discover in him a mature thinker in his twenty-fourth year.

The history of Noren's personality from his eighteen to his twenty-fourth year, is a history of the development

of a gigantic intellect. Already he exhibited a remarkable thirst for knowledge, and a knowledge, deeper by far than that to be attained by the collegiate curriculum, of necessity. With his collegiate studies he was perfunctory. In fact, he did not think seriously of study, and only at the time of his examination for his degree did he busy himself in strict reading, and then only to pass. His spare time was engaged in other studies, in attending lectures and in mastering the thoughts of the thinkers of his time. Of course, in some respects, his collegiate studies were the same as those he personally undertook. One purpose he had essentially in mind, and this was the acquiring of a synthetic education, the development of the faculties of mind for an original intellectual life.

"Cramming the memory is the wrong way," said Noren to a college-mate who questioned him as to the reason he was not worried at the time of examination. "I study only to pass. Degrees are necessary, otherwise there is no financial opportunity. It is not learning which is the ideal, for I find that with many of the boys, study ceases after the degree has been secured. We ought to form some clear understanding of the theory and meaning and moral uses of knowledge." He was true to this belief to the end, and drew out a personal curriculum for himself which he followed daily as a self-imposed duty. This tendency developed Noren's mind and made him a fountain of information in real knowledge and on those subjects in which he delighted and specialised.

He became an omnivorous reader of newspapers, magazines, novels and contemporary writings, and was eager for the latest revelation. It was in these channels that he unconsciously directed the enthusiasm and excitement of the young man that he was. A new idea was as provocative of pleasure to him as a new trick in the gymnasium. At this time, also, the theatre was brought into the social life of Bengal, and Noren, in amateur performances, would instil the theatrical consciousness among his fellows.

It would always be some uplifting theme around which the performance would be played. Indeed, he played the role of the *Yogi* in the *Nava-Brindavan* of Babu Keshub Chandra Sen, the great social reformer. Noren saw in the theatre a medium for the propaganda of national, moral, religious and civic ideals. In this he anticipated, in India, the dawn of that liberal sense of progression which has characterised the spirit of the Western nations, that have seen in the stage and in music and in the drama, great opportunities for the expression, even of the highest spiritual ideals. Noren's idea was, that the stage should voice the policy and spirit of a Rejuvenated Hinduism. True it is, that, because of the peculiar condition in which womanhood finds itself in India, only a certain class of women have entrée to the theatrical profession. But was it not even so some three decades of years since in the West? Let it be remembered that it was only in most recent years that Indian womanhood was accorded full educational privileges. Such was the thought of Noren.

Noren counteracted the intensity of his thought and that overseriousness and aloofness which came with it, by energetic play, and, of all his sports, he was most partial to athletic exercises. He took part in all those games that made for the freedom of the body and the vigour and joyous physical consciousness of youth. He had started a gymnasium in his school days, and introduced all the latest methods in the training of muscle and limb. He was daring in the strenuousness of it all. *Lathi*-play was a favourite pastime. The *lathi* is peculiar to India. It is a long staff, strong and firm, and is used, much as a sword in fencing is in the West. Those who are experts have developed the same faculties of attention, the same swiftness of motion and the same coolness of nerve as are necessary to the Western sword-fencer. There is as much danger in the play, as much excitement and the same masculine consciousness. Indeed, the *lathi* is also the weapon of defence, and he who can spin it at fastest speed, can even ward off a shower of stones, so

it is said. It is used as a protection in the jungle, and the force which is put back of it, accelerated and intensified by the swiftness of motion, causes it to revolve at such surprising speed that an attacking animal is frightened off. The noise that is made is a loud buzzing. Noren was proficient with the *lathi* from boyhood. He learned the art from Mussalmans with whom he had become friends. While attending the Metropolitan Institution he was invited, as a spectator, to a gymnastic exhibition in connection with a fair. There were many young contestants in *lathi*-playing. Excitement was lagging when Noren, then a boy of ten, sprung into the ring and challenged any one of them. The strongest accepted his challenge. The *lathi*-fencing reached a high pitch. The spectators became nervous. Then Noren, with a special knowledge of the *lathi* he had acquired from the Mussalmans, swung about, and struck his opponent's *lathi* in such a way that it fell buzzing from his hand and broken in the centre. The spectators were thrilled. Noren's opponent was far older than he, and larger in build, also. Noren won the first prize as victor, and thereafter became and remained the hero of the Metropolitan Institution.

Running and jumping matches were also a part of the gymnastic exercises. Then, too, there were long marches into the open country, excursions on the river, the rowing of boats in races on the Ganges, wrestling and other forms of strenuous exercise. He made efforts to excel in each branch, and in several he was reckoned the champion with honours, as for example, in wrestling. The consequent vigour of body made the mind alert. The senses in Noren became keenly awake and he had a love for the beautiful. In this he was romantic, and the romance never degenerated into anything that bordered on a less than exalted ethical or poetical conception. He had grown to full physical estate. He was muscular, agile and inclined to stoutness. All his enthusiasm flowed into a love of nature and a love for learning. Play and study were the absorbing elements in Noren's youth and early manhood. As previously stated,

however, he was more earnest in study. Towards the close of his seventeenth year, he had quite renounced play for play's sake and given most of his attention to serious things. It was serious things, interspersed with play. Hereafter, one sees him as the student. His entire outlook became intensely intellectual. He tried to enter a larger world where personal austerity and faithfulness to an ideal composed the groundwork of a loftier life. It was natural with him. He affected nothing intellectually, as students oftentimes do. He was born to this life of study.

Underneath the conscious surface of his mind were the swift currents of deeper realities. Immediately before him were periods of stress and doubt and a breaking away from many cherished dreams and many early beliefs. But deeper than all was that which preserved him throughout,—a character. It is not only experience that makes character. Innately there may be a heightened moral perception, working as an indomitable instinct for righteousness and pushing the personality, through trials, tribulations and temptations, and the liabilities to waywardness, into the safe haven of an established vision, where morality is always an unconscious process, where there is no struggle, and where holiness is instinct. Instinctively, some see the right or the wrong of circumstance. They follow the instinct. Later they come to understand "Why." It was so with Noren. It was the full tendency to a complete character that, in a large sense, made him what he was. Otherwise, he would have become a brilliant intellect, but not the spiritual teacher of men. And his character, purified as it was, became the support of his intellect, spiritualising it. It also became the infallible proof of his teaching.

The chief element in his character was purity. He was inexorable in his vision of the ideal in this respect. In the time of his youth, a lad is often open to many influences of a dubious character. The opportunities for questionable adventures are many, but the mother of Noren made his understanding of good a matter of personal loyalty to her-

self and to the family. Then, too, something always "held" him back as he himself later remarked. Though a boy to the core of his heart, delighting in all that called forth the spirit of manliness, he stood as one of another world when it was suggested to him that he should enter upon devious paths. One who had spent his youth, without a particular fineness as to the ideals of the moral life and who, later on, became converted in his ways, and a disciple of the Swami Vivekananda, spoke of young Noren in this light of purity. He knew him as a flame of spirituality. Though he frequently made sport of his college-mate as being over-puritanical, yet, he said there were times when he felt depressed beyond words in the presence of Noren. He seemed to see his own deficiency in this respect in the fiercest meaning and in all its degrading reality. He said of Noren that spirituality literally radiated from him as an overwhelming influence. He was not alone in this. The other friends of Noren perceived the same radiance of purity. All through life this virtue continued to be the guiding impulse in Noren's career. He saw all ideals and all visions of the soul and of God through this instinct. It was the background to all his thought and feeling. He had accustomed himself to call, and literally regard every woman, as all monks should, as "MOTHER."

It was this purity that shone about him as the religious atmosphere about a saint; and he had always considered and made this the cardinal virtue. He believed as he came to know the principles of the Vedanta philosophy that, without chastity, or better said, without purity the spiritual life is impossible. To him, in his manhood, purity was not a state of resistance to evil, but an overwhelming passion for good, in each and every aspect. It was a burning, radiant, spiritual force. It related itself to all forms of life. It became the keynote of his message. It outgrew for him its special definitions, developing far beyond the idea of sex into the actual vision of divinity and truth. He realised, instinctively, the great teaching of Jesus, the Christ, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they *shall* see God!" Yes, he knew

it was only they, it was only the pure in heart who see God !

The spirit of manliness,—or was it something vaster, higher, more profound ?—ran through all the experiences of his youth. One becomes conscious of him as a *power*. It was not weakness that he was good, but strength, *strength*, GREAT STRENGTH. It was *Brahmacharya* which was his ideal of studentship,—*Brahmacharya*, which is hard intellectual labour, combined with and governed by a great personal purity. This is the stage of preparation in mind and heart for the Vision which shall come, as the Scriptures say, to those who lead that life.

The boy, Noren, had become a *Brahmacharin* in spirit. His purpose was fixed, so far as intention and character went. He had entered into the serious mood of life. He did not quite understand as yet the full purport of life, and his enthusiasm, deep and resolved, had not as yet been tested by other periods of a difficult nature that were to come, when doubt should be rife and the very foundations of belief shaken. He had not yet known, nor could begin to know, that struggle of soul which inevitably comes of a tempest of thought. He was all idealist. His spirit nourished itself upon idealism and ideal things. He had not, even for a moment, known the pang of disillusion. The horizon was roseate for him. Youth sees only the ideal as in a dream. It requires much pressure of circumstance, much thought and much overcoming of the sense of defeat to make the vision of the ideal an actuality in the domain of the real.

Fortunate is youth, but more fortunate is the man who has come out of the byways of youth into the highroad of later years, still possessed of enthusiasm ; though its flame be not as intense, it will burn steadier, and is self-consciously and triumphantly sure that it will not be extinguished by the many and angry winds of life. Such an one becomes a master of men, a leader, a prophet. The days of the intellectual struggle are the days of test and tribulation,

and the days, also, of intellectual temptation. Blessed is the man whose heart remains unclouded, while the clouds of doubt possess ascendancy over the mind. In the spiritual purposes of life, these trials are particularly necessary. They give character and conviction ; they give surety and fixity of vision and of purpose. Does the soul stand this ordeal, then victory is sure. And the victory is the actual seeing of God, the sounding of the depth of the Soul !



XX

THE WONDER OF THE LORD'S SONG.

"In that time I was accustomed to read the Gita and certain thoughts contained therein would go throbbing through my brain for days and nights,"—thus spoke the Swami Vivekananda to his followers referring to the days of his youth. The Gita is the prime gospel of Hinduism. It is the spirit, the all in all, of the Hindu experiences of the soul. It is the enunciation, under a most dramatic and inspiring setting, of the ideals of the philosophy of Vedanta, the end of all wisdom. He read chapter after chapter of this wonderful book, which has been versified, from the Sanskrit into the English language, by Sir Edwin Arnold in "The Song Celestial." He read the Gita, and chapter after chapter burned into his soul and the impression was indelible. It is the prayer-book of Hinduism, especially of this modern time, and that it is so, is not a little due to the interpretation of it by the Swami Vivekananda.

How thrilling and how rich with meaning is the Bhagavad-Gita, or the Lord's Song! It is part of the Indian epic, the Mahabharata, wherein is told, in sublime pictures, the story of that early Hinduism when the Aryan civilisation was at its height, and when the five Pândava brothers fought against a hundred unrighteous cousins for their rightful share of the kingdom. The rush of battle, the clang of weapons, the noise of speeding chariots, vast assemblies of armed men, the flow of intense passions are the opening notes of the Gita. Arrows fly, powerful arrows, made intensely powerful by the blessing and the force of enchanted prayers. Huge missiles buzz through the atmosphere, sure messengers of death and wholesale destruction. The battle was scattered in those times, certain companies warring with other companies, and the combat continued

for long, wearisome days. The heroic kings rode out into the midst of the battle-field, awaiting royal foes.

Through the wide avenue of contending men one sees a great chariot, drawn by swift, spirited steeds clad in armour. Within the chariot is seated the hero Arjuna and before him stands Sri Krishna Vasudeva, the Divine Charioteer. Both hero and Charioteer are of the royal race, and both are girded and robed and turbaned as become the kings of men. And in the hand of Arjuna, the prince of all archers, is the heavy bow, *Gāndiva*, and the quiver of mighty arrows hangs at his side. He is the giant and the hero, yet one cannot fail to perceive the sadness, almost fear, that is shadowed on his countenance. The chariot has been driven into the centre of the field. The Charioteer is anxious to spur the steeds on to the fray. But Arjuna has fallen to the floor of the chariot, letting his mighty bow drop from his hand. The quiver of arrows lies idle. Utmost depression has overcome him and he gives vent to grief in passionate utterances. The Charioteer is surprised. He addresses the hero in strong terms, asking him not to yield to un-Aryalike weakness. And Arjuna replies that it is not weakness that has overtaken him. He has fallen a prey to the thought that he stands in battle, armed against all the friends of his childhood and youth, his relatives and many of his teachers of old. Then the Charioteer is transfigured. Over His face has come the radiance of a great illumination. The moment is tense. Arjuna gazes at the countenance of the Charioteer. He has forgotten his grief. Sri Krishna's face is so rapt in spiritual light that Arjuna forgets all, the steeds, the chariots, the roar of battle, and his soul communes with the divine soul of the Charioteer-Incarnation of the Lord.

To read the Gita is a matter of hours. To understand the Gita is the work of repeated lives. But the words were not mere words to Arjuna ; they were illumination to him. The effort of a lifetime was intensified into a moment. It flashed upon Arjuna, as lightning flashes across the sky—the illumination which is the Bhagavad-Gita. Then he

went into battle with intensity of purpose. He fought ; he slew ; he conquered—but yet he realised that he neither fought, nor slew, nor conquered any, for Sri Krishna had told him.—

“If the red slayer thinks he slays,
Or if the slain thinks he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep and pass and turn again.”

“Never the Spirit is born ; the Spirit shall cease
to be—never.
Never was time It was not ; end and beginning
are dreams.
Birthless and deathless and changeless remaineth
the Spirit forever.
Death has not touched It at all, dead though the
house of It seems.”

The Lord had told him also that there was no doer but Himself, the Lord of the Universe, and that when realisation would come to Arjuna, all dreams of the manifold and many should pass and only the One Existence, the Existence of the Lord, should BE. He was told to fight because it was the duty of his royal position, his *Swadharma*, and because it was right.

On and on the story goes, resonant with an Infinite Voice that declares, “This My Maya is divine, made up of blessed qualities, and very difficult to cross. Yet those that come unto Me, cross the river of life.” Maya is the dream of life, and this dream is transcended by Arjuna who soars, past the universe, into the Soul of the Lord. The Consciousness of God had taken the name and form which was the personality of Sri Krishna, but the Lord knew Himself and was ever awake, as Himself, behind the personality He had assumed. So that He threw off all veils and all the falseness and limitation of personality, and stood Self-revealed before the hero as the Fountain-flow of Life and yet beyond its bondage. He revealed Himself as the Lord of all things ;

and the truth that only He alone existed, became verity and reality to Arjuna. For when He is all in all, whom is there to slay and who, indeed, is the slayer ! The Lord says to all men in the Gita that, if they come to Him, they are sure to awaken from the world-dream. They will see the Divine Self beyond all personality, that One Individual to Whom all personality is only an approach.

What a vision of the soul was the privilege of Arjuna ! He realised that the soul could neither be destroyed by fire, nor dried by the wind, nor wetted by water, nor pierced by the sword. All illusion had died out for him. He saw the Self within him as that same Divine Self, incarnate as the Lord in the personality of his Charioteer.

What a conception of work is embodied in the Gita ! "To work one has the right, but not to the fruits thereof." Why should one care for results ? It was here that Noren caught a glimpse of that important truth that the individual does not do good to others but to himself, and that one should be grateful to the beggar for the opportunity given of helping himself. The work sanctifies the worker, apart from the fruits of work. The true worker is the selfless worker who cares only for the privilege of work, leaving the results to the wisdom and the disposition of Providence.

What a mass of culture, what heights of illumination, what grandeur of race experience, what insight and what vision are made incarnate by the Gita ! Truly, Noren in his youth had become as devoted to the Gita as though it were a personality. He loved it with a great love as one loves a friend among friends. To him it was a priceless treasure and the Scripture of all scriptures, the core of spiritual truth. He loved it because it was a document of soul, that had been written in the silence of the soul even in the midst of the great tumult of a battle-field. Not only was it written into the heart of Arjuna in the silence of the soul, but within the halo of that sublimity which is conceivable to man only, in the language of limited thought, as the Divine Life. It was, to Noren, the call to work on the battle-field of life in

the innermost shrine of self-consciousness, when one knows that duty for duty's sake is the only path and when one is not governed either by fear or by desire. It was, to Noren, the call to rest firmly on the consciousness that the soul is indestructible and changeless in a world of destruction and change, and that shining as the true consolation amid the terror of life is the Presence that always calls, "Those that come unto Me, cross the river of life."

This was the undertone of Noren's life in the days of shadow that were to come. The intellect would waver, but the heart of him was certain to know in ways mysterious to the intellect. This was the consolation in the dark hours of Noren's life over which the clouds of doubt would pass, that part of his life, in particular, which was to be in the passing of the next few years.

This was the spirit of the Gita for Noren and through it he saw, as through a perspective, the structure of the Hindu consciousness. For this reason he remained faithful to the heart of Hinduism, though it seemed, to all outward appearance, that he had parted, for a time later on, with many of its forms. The Gita made him manly in the cause of Hinduism. It brought fire into his heart and he felt for Hinduism as a son for his mother. Though he might have seen, even at this time, flaws and defects in it, he made an effort to conceal these as one would conceal a mother's faults,—while within himself he laboured for the correction of all the mistakes, and all the corruptions that had crept into Hinduism. From a higher point of view and through the larger historic perspective, he saw the faults and failings of Hinduism as coming from without the pale of the Hindu consciousness, *per se*, and to have been inevitably taken on through foreign contact with peoples and invaders of an inferior civilisation coming into Hindusthan. But he was also and always conscious of the glories of Hinduism and of the spiritual superiority of the Hindu outlook on life.

It was the Gita spirit he had when he answered a Christian missionary who was preaching to a large crowd against

idol-worship. The missionary was saying, "If I give a blow to your idol with my walking-stick, what can it do?" The audience remained silent. It was composed, for the most part, of lads and men who were too ignorant, even with regard to Hinduism, to make a telling reply. Noren was passing by with a number of his college-mates on his way home. He listened eagerly. Then came the above blasphemous remark from the missionary and Noren retaliated immediately by saying, "If I abuse your god what can he do?" The speaker, not expecting such a questioning spirit, replied hastily and with some temper, "You would be punished in eternal hell-fire when you die." Noren was equal to the occasion. "So my idol will punish you when you die," he said. This broke the meeting. The preacher was beside himself, with anger while the audience joined Noren's companions in a peal of laughter.

At this time he had also pondered much on the social aspects of the Vedanta teaching of the equality of all souls. He asked himself, "If all souls are of God and in God, why is there not the same social freedom accorded to every man? Why should there be caste?" An occasion brought out his silent belief into actual statement when a friend of his was asked by his father to salute a Brâhman. The Brâhman caste is the highest and the boy was of the caste next to it. Heretofore, he had only saluted the gods. So he asked his father, "Why must one salute the Brâhmans?" He received as answer, "My boy, Brâhmans have come out from the mouth of Brahman, the Creator." This seemed a flimsy explanation, and so the boy went to Noren and asked him why God should have created such great social differences and distinctions. Noren, who did not then take into account the ancient, but now relaxed, uses of caste, said, "It is all foolishness. The thing is, you see, a method by which one class tyrannises over the others and profits thereby in all ways." He realised, however, that many of the members of the higher caste were succumbing to modern influences in industry and in education, and thereby not properly

worthy of the traditions of the Brāhmins of ancient times, who held the position of both priest and educator. In Vedic days when Aryans were still building up the civilisation of Hinduism, it was a pure culture, but in the present age, he is the true Brāhman, thought Noren, who is most worthy, most learned, most steadfast in virtue and highest in the realisation of the Hindu outlook on life, whatever be his caste. So Buddha had preached, and so the Swami Vivekananda preached it anew. Was it because he had heard that Voice declare in that memorable hymn of Shankaracharya, "I never had death nor fear. I never had father, nor mother, nor birth, nor death, nor friend, nor foe, nor caste, nor creed. I am! Existence, Knowledge, Bliss-Absolute! I am the Blissful One! I am the Blissful One!" and had rendered this spiritual reality into the terms of a new social consciousness!



XXI

THE VISION OF THE EXALTED LIFE.

Strange, indeed, are the experiences of certain souls. They seem, almost, above the ordinary in human life in the thoughts they think and in the vision which is theirs, because of the intensity of their thought. The ideal is seen through the perspective of thought. Intensified, the thought loses its separate aspect and becomes the ideal itself. This is the secret of meditation. The luminous thought is the parent of the luminous vision ; it is the roadway thereunto.

The modern science of psychology is bringing to light remarkable wonders, thereby corroborating and illustrating the revelations of the ancient Rishis. It speaks of sleep as the state of awareness by the mind, in ways other than those of normal consciousness. The mind works, though the body is silent and at rest. The body is in repose, but the mind works on. What light this throws on the phenomena of sleep ! Somnambulism is one of the instances. See how the mind leads the body safely along unknown paths, though the faculty of sight has no physical medium ! Who has not heard of the many cases of the working-out of difficult mathematical or other problems, while the body is stilled in sleep ? Sometimes the solution is written down, unbeknown to the conscious mind, and lo and behold the surprise in the morning ! And who has not heard of the author seeing the full development of a future narrative or poem in the mysterious workings and revelations of the dream-consciousness ! Little is known of the mind, hardly anything, comparatively, of its potentialities, and the psychologist has tested phenomena that are nothing short of marvellous.

The mind is most receptive in the drowsy state before the brain succumbs to the stimulus of sleep, and also, before it is aroused by the instinct to awaken. Then it is that the mind

takes on ideas with deepest impression. As an instance, known to many, the awakening in the morning at a given time is the suggestion, carried out by the mind, which it has received the night before. The mind is conscious, in its own realm, though the body lies unconscious. Unconsciousness is, after all, only of the body. The deepest unconsciousness of the body is death. But even the mind can become unconscious; when this occurs, then consciousness has ascended, in the state of exalted illumination, beyond the mental self into the Self-reality of Soul and God. This is the test of the spiritual verity that the Self in man is ever awake.

What is science in the knowledge of these matters with the West, is instinct with the Hindu. It was an aroused instinct in the personality of such an one as Noren. How he knew the secret one cannot tell, or even imagine. It is unaccountable. At all events, it was his custom at this time in his life to present vividly before his mind two strikingly dissimilar pictures,—one the life of comfort, ease, luxury, the life of the senses, the enjoyment of wealth, power and the love of a devoted wife and family, in short, the worldly life,—while the other picture was of the Sannyâsin, a wanderer having no possessions, fixed in the consciousness of Divine Reality, living as fortune causes him to drift, eating only such food as chance might bring, and lying at night under the roofless sky in the jungle or on the mountain-side. The pictures would glow alternately in the colouring, and as there were two pictures, there were, also, within himself, two painters, one the spirit of desire, the other, the spirit of renunciation. By this time, the semi-conscious act of Noren's mind, presenting itself with these two pictures, drifted, beyond the field of volition into a self-regulating and self-moving vision. Behind the work and the separate personalities of these painters, referred to as within himself, was the Higher Self of Noren, the discriminating self, the Viveka self, as the witness. The self of him, as it withdrew into its innermost, drew with it, as by force, the painting of renunciation. The other would fade and fade, until, finally, it was lost.

The painting of sense was tinted in varied hues. The purposes of the painter, desire, were numerous as the sands of the sea. The spirit of desire was self-multiplying in a myriad ways. The outlines of the picture were in the beauty of form and flesh, and there were phantoms that the painter had brought into the background of the canvas; and they looked great and powerful. But then, their appearance was left largely to the desire-fired imagination. The forms of these phantoms were ethereal and undefined, but in the immediate perspective were all the glories of the world richly coloured and attractive. The phantoms were those of ambition and of possession, and above what seemed to be the enveloping atmosphere containing the entire setting of sense was, on closer examination, found to be the all-absorbing and all-grasping spirit of the painter himself. He had coloured the whole canvas with his personality. But to Noren, moving in a higher sphere of life, the apparent beauty was all ugliness, because the spirit of truth and reality was missing. He saw things on the canvas that were, evidently, not intended to be seen. Lurking behind the personality of the spirit of ambition, he saw the spectre of oblivion and death. Behind the spirit of possession, he beheld the spectre of loss and ill-gottenness, and the enveloping atmosphere, which was desire, he saw, in some transfigured way, as the spectre of illusion, of change and of sorrow. Even so, there are many colourings and forms and shades, imprinted on the canvas, that are not intended by the painter to be seen, but the judicious and discriminating critic observes these unintentional impressions. The untrained observer does not see them. To Noren it was all a will-o'-the-wisp; to another, it would have appeared as a desirable reality, so strong and so fateful is the power of illusion. But this comprehension came to Noren as his self withdrew, upon the wings of sleep, into the deep, deep stages of that reality, which was the Innermost of him.

On the other hand, he saw the spirit of renunciation as an angel of light whose face was illumined; and the canvas

revealed wonders, awe-inspiring wonders, terrible wonders. The colouring was grey, for the most part. In the foreground Noren saw the figure of a man, naked but for a loin-cloth. His nakedness was covered with ashes which he had put upon himself, as the prophets of old had done in Judæa. The ashes had been taken from a fire that burned before him and into which he gazed intently. Behind him rose a wilderness of forest. In the distance towered a stretch of mountain peaks, covered with eternal snows. Noren's mind became centred upon the picture. It drifted, without effort and with power, into the purpose of the artist, the spirit of renunciation. He became master of the thought the artist attempted to portray, thought which rushed as a swift torrent into one line of intense concentration and direction. The thought was in the painting and yet out of it, for those who are not of the spirit of renunciation can never have the vision of such thought. Even as the saint's vision is not deceived by the fraud of sense, howsoever gloriously painted, so, also, the man of worldly consciousness, gazing at the painting of renunciation, sees not the greatness of the soul, but only the representations of ascetic life, which are always repulsive to a mind immersed in sense.

The thought of the meditating sage, in the painting of renunciation, was fixed as are the fixed stars. It was focussed upon the Self, of Divine Nature, behind the assemblage of thought and desire and personal consciousness. The world stormed against it. Desire swept by it in forceful currents, but the meditation of the sage could not be shaken. Cold and hunger were written in the gaunt figure of the man, but he had soared, beyond humanity, into the Divine Reality, where all physical extremes and all extremes of thought were lost. His countenance was grey with renunciation, but his eyes were as suns of illumination. Before those eyes all the glory of the world had passed, but all its glory could not exhaust or lessen their super-sensuous radiance. He had become the soul,—the Soul!

And as for Noren, he was no longer Noren. The word

Noren was only name of the personality. His soul had fled, beyond all the limitations of the personal consciousness, on the wings of insight, into the spirit of the meditating sage, who rested all-absorbed in God and the Eternal Supreme Consciousness. And was this,—could this be sleep! Was it,—could it have been but a dream! Ah no! For Noren it was a vision; it was the vision of the exalted life!

The genius for such a vision comes only after much conscious and intense concentration in the state of spiritual thought. The mind must be imbued with the ideal of reality, day after day, and then it comes,—the vision. Blessed is the lad who has had such a vision. Is not his, the true insight into life? Were it not for those glimpses of the verity beyond life, is it possible that Noren could have stood fixed and firm in the hour when the mind turned upon itself in all the agony of doubt?

The great mind goes, consciously, beyond the stupefying effect of the brain-consciousness in sleep. It leaves the body, conscious and at will, because it has accustomed itself to leave, at will, the very idea of the body and know, both in thought and in desire, the grand idea of the soul. The body is, at bottom, an idea, and in the transcendence over this idea by the inner consciousness does the reality of spiritual life dawn forth. There is no state of forgetfulness or unawareness in the spiritual life. The body is unconscious; but then it is only an instrument. The heart of the Self, is never unconscious. It is the subject of these bodies of thought and of form. Within is forever and ever, the Silent, Ever-watchful Witness.

On retiring, Noren would lie prostrate on the floor in the Oriental fashion of profound salutation. Was it that he believed that this posture was the befitting attitude of the body while the mind, through the avenues of sleep, entered into the silence of the meditating soul! And meditation is the thought, constant and inspiring, of the soul upon the nature of the Lord. In India there is the ideal that life should be so understood and regulated that each and every

function of personality should be translated into the service and the thought of God. If one is eating, that is offering unto the Lord, the Self within. Does one walk, it is *pradakshina*, circumambulating the temple of the Lord. Does one see, it is all the Presence of the Lord. Does one think, let it be a meditation upon the Lord. Does one sleep, let the act of resting be a prolonged posture of adoration before the Lord, and so on until every phase of life becomes deified and divine. The conscious mind, thinking and living such thoughts, naturally, in the time of sleep unconsciously takes up the same thread of spiritual meditation. And Noren's sleep was, as it were, meditation on the Lord. Such sleep, such meditation was the vision of the exalted life. All the world sees what the senses represent. All the world lives on the knowledge that the senses reveal. The exalted life is seen by the fewest of the few who know that life is but a dream.

Noren was alive with joy and aspiration. He would be a monk! Was marriage suggested to him by his parents, at this time, he spurned the idea and demanded freedom in the matter as a right. He could conceive of marriage only as a bondage, so high had the ideal of life become to him. Wonderful states of mind visited him. Again and again, his body would seem to him as a form seen in a dream; it was vague and undefined in those moments of tremendous insight when, it seemed, as if the spiritual consciousness would force its way upon the conscious mind. It is said that Wordsworth and Tennyson had similar states of vision in certain of their exalted moods. All these things come to highly refined and highly developed spiritual natures. Now and then, this state of thought was so heightened in Noren that, in the solitude of his soul, while walking in the public park, he would strike his head against a tree in order that the pain of this experience would assure him of the body's existence and bring him forcibly back to the plane of physical consciousness! Who will say of such a demonstration that it was a strange action on his part! Would not any of the ideas of the soul's absolute existence,

of its immortality and consequent independence of physical form and environment, produce in some souls, a like forgetfulness of the so-called realities of sense? Death and change, of themselves, bring to the mind the relative existence of the body. And he who is conscious of the soul as the Real Self, forgets even the relative existence of the physical man. He knows himself as the spiritual ego, dwelling within the radiance of the Most High. The very aim of religion is the transcendence, by the inner man, over all physical ideas.

If it be true that the mind repeats the experiences of life until complete emancipation is at hand, then it is conceivable that, here and there, souls would bring over the intensely pronounced features of former conscious lives, into the present incarnation. The transition would be revealed in some form of instinct which, heightened in some natures, the scientist calls genius. The knowledge and effort of the past have been twined into the tendency of to-day. The scientist becomes the greater scientist. Finally, the vision breaks into the greater vision, through the effort of repeated lives, and the seeker sees the divine reality as unmistakable truth, whatever may have been the special line of tendency and development. In that stage the scientist throws aside the scientific instrument, the artist throws aside his brush, the poet drops his pen, the sage his thought, the saint his aspiration, and all of them, being emancipated souls, enter into that Silence and Peace and that Realisation which is God ;—and this, because the Highest Knowledge has been attained in the adding of experience after experience in the living of many lives.

There are some thoughts, though one has never heard them expressed before, that seem quite natural to the hearer. There are states of thought and consciousness to which one instinctively responds, causing surprise at the fact even to one's self. There are some relationships of persons and of places with which it seems one has been associated before. Noren found himself oftentimes in this paradoxical position. When he met certain people, or visited a certain house, or heard certain ideas expressed, or thought certain ideas, for

the first time, he would pause as if to recollect when he had known them, as they seemed to have been already familiar to him. The recollection was vague in most cases ; but sometimes he was certain, and the personality or the thought thus cognised would thereafter always be a close and deep matter of his mind and heart. In later life this was still more evident with him in the relationship of himself as teacher to some of his disciples and others.

All is within. Multiple is personality. Was it that the two spirits, manifest in his vision as desire and renunciation respectively, were two separate streams of thought that had been personified, as it were, in the pressure of their concentration upon consciousness ? Be that as it may, it was gloriously certain that the Spiritual Self of Noren held mastery, choosing the tendency to renunciation, because of the discrimination he had gathered in the living of many lives, by which he knew that desire was illusion, and that renunciation of desires was the only path for the soul to gain the Consciousness of God.

Some lives are beyond understanding. They are enshrouded in mystery because of the ignorance that rests with the average man concerning the great in soul. It is difficult to grasp the contents of a personality, great in the worldly conception of greatness. How much more difficult is it then to understand a man of God, a spiritual genius ! But the illumination is with men, though they do not perceive the source. Loftier and loftier the vision becomes. In the end it is the Beatific Vision of God.

XXII.

THE DAWN OF THE INTELLECTUAL LIFE.

The period of the intellectual awakening is with everyone. The fetters of a disciplinary education are thrown off and the mind roams in its own peculiar way, along special paths of intellectual penetration. The college curriculum, of necessity, must be mastered, but it proves the greatness of the mind if the individual transcends the bounds of the learning afforded by the collegiate course and pursues the particular phase or phases that call out the original activity of the intellect.

Noren's thought was taken up with many branches of learning. There were mathematics and astronomy. In the latter branch he met with unusual success, mastering, in the fourth year of his college life, the whole of "Godfrey's Astronomy." He delighted in higher mathematics. Sanskrit had been a favourite study with him from boyhood. Before he had attained his twelfth year he had stored in memory the text of the *Mugdhabodha Vyākaraṇa*, the Sanskrit grammar, and at the age of seventeen he could compose in Sanskrit. To his mother-tongue, the Bengali, he was most devoted, and in his study and enthusiasm he developed such a proficiency in it that, he has left several remarkable works in that language, which entitle him to take rank amongst the makers of modern Bengali literature.

His memory was exceptional, and this faculty, it may be said, he inherited largely from his mother, of whom it is stated that, a poem once recited before her she could ever afterwards repeat verbatim. Noren used this faculty to a wonderful degree of development. He had the power of concentration, of steadying the mind so that it could store up in the chambers of memory whatever he desired. One does not wonder. For in India, for innumerable ages, culture and learning and tradition were handed down by word of mouth and stored

in the memory. Memory is a racial phenomenon with the Hindus. In the ancient days, the killing of a Brāhman was the most heinous of sins, for it meant the cutting off of one of the main channels through which the racial learning and experience flowed. For this reason, as well, was a Brāhman so highly venerated in olden times ; he was the personification of the Aryan civilisation. Even now one sees in the temples at Benares the orthodox Brāhman boy memorising at the very dawn of day, passage upon passage of sacred texts.

With Noren, development of memory was exceptional, and his mind was a great treasure-place of information. As the Swami Vivekananda he aroused in others a great reverence for himself in this regard. Indeed, at times, it seemed mysterious. Even at the end of his life he could recite whole passages that had been once read to him, to the astonishment of his Western followers. Verily, psychology, which is only lately coming to be recognised as a science with the West, is ages old as a practical consciousness with the educated and thoroughly Hinduised Indian mind. The West still marvels at the revelations of modern psychology, but in India the psychological experience has been classified, and methods for its development have been understood, centuries before the Christian era. Consequently, wonderful are those peculiar traits in the Indian make-up of mind,—the faculty of attention, the faculty of retention and the faculty of analysis.

Philosophy is the groundwork of the Indian culture ; even in the customs of the Hindu peoples one can read the signs and shadowings of philosophical truth. The Hindu outlook on life is throughout steeped in philosophical idealism. Behind each single custom rests a large idea, having spiritual bearings of a philosophical character. Thus, innately the Hindu is a philosopher. From childhood his mind is trained, through the symbolism of culture and religious tradition, to regard and discuss, in youth and in manhood, the most daring speculations concerning the nature of the universe and man. It is this peculiar national character-

istic which has largely stood in the way of the success of Christian missionaries. In the realm of metaphysics, particularly such metaphysics as possess theological or spiritual aspects, the Hindu is quite at home, much to the discomfort of those who strive to convert him to Western religions or Western systems of thought. Noren's home was, as it were, a training-school in this respect. Each custom and tradition his parents explained to him in its spiritual and philosophical significance. The daily worship, the acts of meditation, the ordinary comings and goings in the household, all of these involved certain semi-spiritual and semi-philosophical convictions. Then, too, his father's passing away had, in no small degree, strengthened this instinct, directing it, more and more, to the understanding of those mysteries of life and death about which all philosophical speculation has been built up. Noren's temperament was, in this respect, not only normally Hindu, but naturally intense. It is easy, then, to understand why he turned a passionate attention to the study of philosophy in his collegiate days, and why he specialised in Western philosophy. He desired to understand of what the Western outlook on life consisted.

The abstruse philosophy of Herbert Spencer interested him particularly. He specialised in this system, and became well-versed in Spencerianism, and later on he made it serve the purposes of argumentative support to the more abstruse doctrines of the philosophical consciousness of the Upanishads, the Vedanta,—much as Lafcadio Hearn, although in a less spiritual way, brought this same philosophy to bear so successfully upon the Buddhism of Japan. Herein Noren gathered that power of thought, that penetrating discrimination and that spirit of seeking for a scientific basis, which stood him in good stead in delivering his message in later life. Herein he schooled himself in a tremendous intellectual self-discipline. Together with Spencerianism he studied the systems of the German philosophers, particularly Kant and Schopenhauer, and also those

of John Stuart Mill and of August Comte. He delved into the mystical and analytical speculations of the ancient Aristotelian school, as well. Therefore he was so successfully enabled in his manhood to turn the tables of philosophical certitude upon the limitations he found in the Western systems, to the advantage of the Hindu outlook on life. Therefore he was, also, so successful in winning over, at least in a way of personal admiration if not of an actual following of his doctrine, a graduating class in philosophy of one of the largest universities of America.

He always exchanged the thought of the Indian schools with those of other ages and descriptions. He pondered and paused much before he would accept or reject any particular philosophical statement. In the end he became the champion of the Indian philosophical method and system. Even in later years he was never final in his vision except in so far as the Vedanta was the highest outlook he ever came to know. He was ever on the alert for truth "whatever the cost," as he himself was wont to say. If there was a newer and greater revelation—he must make it his. But the manner and the means whereby he came to accept the Vedanta, instead of any Western system of thought, as the most satisfying philosophy, were not altogether intellectual, nor yet altogether due to himself. It was at the Feet of his spiritual master, Sri Ramakrishna, that he was literally *forced* to understand and accept the Vedanta. But of this later on.

At this age he was also endeavouring to interpret the stratified and ancient commentaries upon Indian philosophy in a new and modern light. The commentaries were accurate, but the reading must be in accordance with the modern outlook and requirements. When he had first read the philosophy of his own culture he trembled at what he then thought were the china-foundations upon which it rested. He doubted, and the period of doubt was a period of agony with him. Then he mastered the Western method and the Western ideas, discovering, at last, that their

essential elements were only approximations to that which his own race had already held as truth for many ages. In this manner, and by intense application he gradually became a seer of the spiritual and intellectual vision of his ancestors, the Rishis and the sages of the ancient Vedic times. But as philosophy and religion in India are inseparable and, also, as the Western methods of thought were inundating Hinduism at this time, and because Noren was master of Western thought, the fact that he came to accept Hinduism, as a philosophical religion, was due in every respect to Sri Ramakrishna, who spurred on the sceptical intellect of Noren, the young man, until it became the element of revelation in the luminous personality of the Swami Vivekananda. This will be seen when the story of the influence exercised over Noren by his Guru is told. One is not now concerned with the methods and the spiritual process involved in Noren's acceptance of the Vedanta. The intention is, at present, simply to mention it as amongst the intellectual possessions he gained in the present chapter of his life.

Not alone in philosophy was the special line of his intellectual development connoted. He had the passion for history, and it was the moral study, which history affords of the conditions under which human character and human events are unfolded, in which he found his chief interest. The heroic epoch he saw as the epoch of renaissance and of strength. He had brought into the focus of his attention the whole panorama of struggle and statesmanship and nation-building that was presented in that voluminous work, Green's "History of the English People." He had learned, in detail, Alison's "History of Europe." He had mastered the history of the French Revolution and the politics of the period, with its long retinue of intense personalities and momentous events. Gibbon's "History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," however, was the historical study with which he became most acquainted ; and those who were with him later on in Rome, say that he knew, as if he had been

there time after time, the memories and spirit which lingered about the ruined glories of that ancient world. Emperors and their doings and the days of the Roman Republic, they say, appeared before them in all their human and historic relations,—so powerful with reality was the flow of his insight in his utterances in this regard. History was to Noren, in his seventeenth as well as in his thirtieth year, the heart-throbbing of the centuries, animated with intensified life and replete with the aspiration and realisation of the nations.

Napoleon was a hero in his eyes because of the strength of the man ; and of Napoleon's generals he spoke often of Marshal Ney. Noren detested weakness all through his life and especially when he dwelt on the historical consciousness, with the leaders and the princes of men. Strength became the motto of his life ; and, as the Swami Vivekananda, he infused the consciousness of the strength of the soul into the substance of the philosophy he taught, because from youth he realised that strength is the gateway to great things. It must not be thought, however, that he left in the background, in his consideration of the histories of various countries, the story of the making of his own nation. Indeed India was the study nearest to his heart. He knew Indian history at this time as he knew his own longing for truth. He knew the Indian historic characters as though he had lived contemporaneously with each of them. To his Western disciples, who followed him to the Orient, he told the tales of the line of the Mogul Emperors or of the great Gupta dynasty of kings, so that they rose as living presences before them and they themselves dwelt in those by-gone ages. He spoke of the women famed in the progress of his nation's history with the same intensity as a lover of English history would speak of Elizabeth the queen. And when he came to stand in the places shrouded with the historic memories of his land, he felt the holiness and the greatness of the past, a past predicting, because of its greatness, a glorious future that was to come. This spirit was owing to the enthusiasm

of the latter years of youth when history was to him as the Lives of Plutarch have been to many a soul which carved its way to greatness, by reason of the inspiration drawn therefrom.

Poetry appeals to some in youth because it is the language of ideals. What prose aims to tell, that poetry vivifies and enriches into realistic vision. The currents of the poetic consciousness compose the stream of the ideal; and youth is attracted thereunto because the mind sees clearest and truest in those days when life is young. Wordsworth was the fixed star for Noren in the poetic firmament. The thought of this poet was as much to him as the exquisiteness of language of his poetic work. He mastered by heart many of those sweet and great passages in which the poet soars, on wings of lofty vision, towards the consciousness of higher things. Poetry was to Noren what it often is to some rare souls,—the painting in word-pictures of the inmost vision, the incarnation, in so far as that is possible, of the ideal into the real. To him the inmost vision was the groundwork of all life, for all life, he believed, was founded on ideals and that failure was due to the lack of vision of the ideal. The ideal was ever dominant with Noren, whatever the line of study, whatever the subject of thought. He lived in the world of ideals, where history and philosophy and poetry and all the sciences were recognised as vast visions of something which was real,—because ideal. He possessed a prophetic vision of learning, wherein thought was seen as subservient to the great purposes of life. He knew thought as the fuel on which the soul fed and which the soul burned in the great effort at Self-revelation, going ultimately beyond all thought. Unconsciously, his quest was ever in the direction of the timeless and the formless in which all ideals live as eternal realities, wherein all aspiration dwells as realisation.

How different are the aims of learning! How varied are the purposes of mind! Some serve learning in order to make knowledge useful to the necessities of commerce, others to make knowledge the avenue to material power. Others,

again, like Plato, serve learning as though it were a divine luminousness ; and they plunge thought into the realms of the Unknown with that serenity and strength of soul which is equal to prayer, for to the great in thought the Unknown is God, the Ideal. Noren found in learning the opportunities for that self-expression which was necessary for the mind before it could be wrapt in silent awe in the presence of the illuminated soul. He ascended the stairs of thought because he desired to realise truth, spiritual and divine, beyond the flight of thought. Unconsciously, it may be, but nevertheless this was the drift of his tendency as time has shown, for he was to awaken to a larger dawn of life in the immediate vision of the Soul.

The note is caught in the assembly of his thought, and the key to the understanding was for him, among other things, that passage in Wordsworth's "Excursion" where he describes the state of trance. Whilst reading this, his English professor turned his thought from the text for a time to explain the word, and in that explanation he mentioned the name which to Noren became the holiest of the holy, the name of his future spiritual teacher, Sri Ramakrishna, the Paramahansa, or the Great Swan of Soul. Such is the title given to those,—and fewest of the few are they,—who sail like swans upon the sea of life, themselves free from the bondage and the darkness of the world, ever gazing above at the Rising of the Sun of God. The word trance also spelled to him, in the explanation, that which his own soul knew in the deeps of meditation and knew later on and invincibly, as the Self, which is indestructible though the body dies and the mind is a prey to change, the Self which is above all dreams, Whose Vision and Whose Consciousness is God.

XXIII.

THE TEMPEST OF THOUGHT.

Sometime or another in the history of great personalities there arises the critical tendency when they survey the beliefs of early life with its unconscious assimilation of tradition and culture. Then there is, very frequently if not always, a rebellion against old standards, or if not such a radical change, at least a great modification of views. Or, though indeed very rarely, it may take the form, first of a rebellion against the inherited faith, then a return to the truth it embodies, having seen it, through much intellectual struggle and wandering, with newer understanding and true spiritual illumination. To all persons this state does not come. The majority are born and live and die in the self-same groove of thought. These are the orthodoxists in any line who decry the others as reformers, rebels and outcasts. But the reformers and the rebels are the makers of epochs or the advanced guards of progress, as history attests.

Education is often the means. With it comes the conscious determination of thought. Originality is the hand-maiden of education. Education itself is the making of new universes of outlook. Associated with originality of thought is always a tempest of thought. The new vision is always born in tempest. Frequently, the current of such a time of tempest is the parting of the ways, a marking of the distinction between the old culture and the new purpose. Unconsciously, it is always an effort at freedom, a development of originality in will which accompanies the awakening of thought. The beliefs of childhood are the *superimpositions* with which the rebel in thought must struggle, generally to overcome them. With the new attitude born of the struggle, arise new resolves which inevitably imply a battle for the recognition of a new vision. And on the other hand, to the champions of orthodoxy the warfare with the new mind

becomes a struggle for very existence. For this reason orthodoxy has always been vehement against reform; between the reformer and the orthodoxist it is always a conflict between life and death. With regard to social matters this is true; with regard to the individual it is truer. The same struggle, which occurs in society as a renaissance or reform, occurs within the domain of personal consciousness as well, taking form as a conflict between old beliefs and new viewpoints of reality, whatever the department of thought, or whatever the character of the outlook.

The period of awakening is always with the new generation, or with the generation gifted with the mobile consciousness of vigorous youth. All know this period. All have passed through it, either consciously, as makers of the new era, or unconsciously, as blind and whipped followers. Many are the elements which contribute to the awakening in each individual. With some it may be the events of the domestic life; with some it may be the perennial flow of energy and tendency, with which they were born, seeking expression through the victory over obstacles. With others it may be the manners and methods of education, developing originality of will and discrimination; with others again it may be the consciousness which comes with the sorrows or the perplexities of the economic struggle. Again, with others it may be a friendship, or a discipleship. Generally, the course of awakening involves the extinction of the child-mind; and the future man, the developed and equipped personality, makes his appearance behind the scenes of doubt. For doubt and disillusion are the accompanying agents of the wreckage of child-creeds. This, however, is in the making of progress. The mind must move, even though it be in pain and under the dark shadows of disillusion. The new vision must be born; and birth is always pain. In the process of that unfoldment, which is education, what wholesale sacrifice of tradition is often necessarily made! What breaking away from ancestral customs and the ancestral outlook on life! Those who remain behind, the orthodoxists, cry out in anguish and

in horror, "Blasphemy! Blasphemy! This is not as our fathers thought! This is not as our fathers did!" But the evolutionary tendency is without remorse. It looks forward, never backward.

Noren's mind had been busy all these years of collegiate life in more ways than even he was conscious of. His was the burning intellect, which arouses every element in the merciless scrutiny of its search for that mental equilibrium which is truth, leaving, for the time being, a great waste of uncertainty and doubt. The philosophy of Spencer is apt to be a dangerous blow to the traditional theological conception of the origin of things. The science of the "First Principles" is liable to prove seriously inimical, if not fatal, to the long-standing theological outlook. Indeed, it pulverizes the very foundations of belief. It gives birth to that seething mental disturbance which is the death-blow to all idealism traditionally founded. Only the strength of an innate idealism, born of the individual soul as an inheritance from a great Spiritual Past, only the power of the poetic and imaginative temperament, can save the larger part of the old personality which is established and governed, through birth and environment, in the traditional consciousness. It will be seen that it was the inherent capacities for the deeper vision that saved young Noren from becoming an unconvertible fatalist and atheist. In him was latent the mystic that-was-to-be, and his spirited soul would not stop its questionings at the agnostic's half-way-house in thought. It dared to plunge into the wilderness in search for Something positive and satisfying beyond. At last, as will be evident in the reading of this life, he came to the realm of imperishable and divine reality and to that which, for lack of better thought and more adequate language, has been called God. The soul of him came to an established consciousness of Something Real and to a consequent peace. But the way was long, though, indeed, the end was sure.

Noren became imbued with Spencerianism. Not alone that. He was an original thinker, bringing the general conception of philosophical inquiry to bear upon the vital ele-

ments in the culture of his own race. And he thought deeply. This inevitably meant pain. In these days he was subject to many moods. He saw the groundwork of the traditional consciousness in which he was reared trembling beneath him. He felt that all was going. Yet he demanded light even at the cost of darkness. Such, frequently, is the paradoxical condition of the awakening mind. Those who loved him most saw the change. He was far removed in these days from the atmosphere in which the family moved. He opened his eyes to the bondage into which the whole nation had been subordinated, as he thought, by the autocracy of the priestly caste; and in solitude when he conferred with his own nature, he vehemently denounced the culture with which he believed the priestly autocracy was able to suppress any spirit of renaissance or selfawakening or reform in the stifled and dumb consciousness of the national life. Such was his thought at this time. In short, he became an out-and-out agnostic.

He who grows into such moods of perception, in India, becomes, at once, a rebel to the Hindu social system. The network of caste and creed becomes intolerable. He becomes a thing apart from his own surroundings. With most persons, this is a dangerous, indeed, a fatal state, for it frequently dulls the moral sense. Particularly is this the case with the romantic temperament. With the gods and religious duties and the series of ascetic and spiritual ideals wiped off the mind, what power is left behind to curb the demands of the turbulent senses? When the ascetic ideal of religion goes, it is not unlikely that the Greek version of life steps in with its stimulus to self-love in the joyous experience of the living of life as it comes. Supporting Noren, however, in these days was the sense of personal dignity that kept alive the moral consciousness and the determination to remain aloof from things that dwelt in the shadow. Truly was this period a tempest of thought, and not alone of thought, but of the whole personality; and wonderful was the strength of the inner self of Noren which bore him through. There was, also, as a quality with the family and with himself, a sur-

rounding of personal dignity which stilled the senses into quietude when their awakening would have meant a prostitution of a higher self-consciousness, involving a breach of the sense of personal refinement. Then, too, his mind was carried, by its own impetus for truth, beyond the sense avenues of expression into a life of pure intellectualism. Deeper than all was the subconscious determination to find a way out of the network of ignorance to the reality of his own nature, if such reality there were, to find a way to God, if God existed. "The problem must be solved!" With him that was the imperative need. To a mind of his mould agnosticism spelled only a mood. He must go beyond that. To him agnosticism implied an intellectual standing-still, a stifling of the powers of the mind which must, in this state, admit failure and defeat, remaining forever under the shadow of doubt, dreadfully conscious of the innate limitations of man. The mystical temperament cannot stop at, "I do not know." The problem of life, the quest for truth is irresistible, and the mind of the true mystic is swept by its own currents, past the borders and boundaries of agnosticism, into sure realisation. O the desire to know! O the longing for more truth! O the search for reality! Noren stood in the maze of agnosticism which he had entered unconsciously in his overwhelming search for truth. But he was as equally determined "to find the way out of this darkness and ignorance."

Another element must be taken into consideration in studying the ethical progress of Noren. He had mastered the intricacies of Comte's Positivistic philosophy which embraces the widest ethical outlook. In this he lived for shelter, and herein he found his solace and also the proper definition and scope of ethics. It might have been, also, that herein he found that wide perspective which is the sympathetic human understanding and the stimulus to service for one's fellow-men. For in later life this was the touchstone of his thought, and it coloured the entire comprehension of his message, which, strange to say, was the very Hinduism he had at this period outgrown. It was by no means a

blockading of the outlets of the imaginative and artistic consciousness which occurred,—as it often does in other cases—simultaneously with the development of Noren's analytical faculties. This consciousness he always bore with him for it did not depend on any outside or acquired education, but because he was the born artist, the born poet. It was the poet, the mystic in him which led him forth into the light he later saw.

His determination, at this time, was to sound all philosophical systems and master the underlying purport, if there were any. Most systems are only intellectual diagrams that mean nothing to the emotional man. It requires as great an act of faith to believe in speculative systems of thought, as it does in theological dogmas presented "to a belief without understanding" under the threat of eternal damnation. Being mere mental diagrams, most systems stifle the creative and responsive faculties of personality. This Noren discovered and was, therefore, always on the look-out for the broader view, the view breathing a dignity of purpose. He did not care for diagrams of truth, however cleverly arranged. He wanted truth as truth. Philosophy, if true, is not metaphysics, in the ordinary definition of that term. It is a presentation of reality and the language thereof; it should be the means, the stimulus to an actual consciousness of reality. True philosophy is the mother of spiritual action, the fountain-flow of creative energy, the highest ennobling stimulus to the will. Hegel, Schopenhauer and Mill were the guides of Noren, but only guides. Spencer he had regarded as infallible; it was because he regarded him, unconsciously, in this light that he struggled through the tempest of thought. Even the greatest philosophers, however, should not be regarded as infallible. They should be looked upon only as guides. Later on he had accustomed himself to put aside the spirit of discipleship with regard to the Western philosophers, and then he triumphed and came out of the tempest of thought into the self-reliant search for and consciousness of truth. He learned to place all philosophy under that scrutiny of

thought to which he had subjected his earlier beliefs and traditions. Then he found that in the philosophies of the West he missed the revelation of the actual, true and positive spirit of man, which is ever idealistic and yet the builder of the glories of human life. Nevertheless he could quote, by heart, pages upon pages of the foreign thought-systems. He asked, "In how far can the system be a divine and spiritual inspiration? In how far can it be the Self-revelation of man?" Even in this stage of studious intellectual inquiry and painful doubt one finds the character of the mystic in his modes of thought. Unless philosophy was the doorway to vision, he felt it must be discarded as an imperfect summary of things, an abstraction, beautiful it might be, but not worth one's while. O the demand of the soul to know truth! What is a pleasing series of thought, a prim system of ideas? It may be gratifying to intellectual conceit, but it can never satisfy the hunger for reality!

Noren's was the seer's self in the youth's make-up of mind. To him the voice of the spirit of agnosticism was the voice of anguish, causing him much mental tribulation and stress of soul. A feeling of emptiness of soul and sadness obsessed him. Why, he could not explain. He entered that world in which every glance and every step is suffering, because it is the world of doubt in which man says, "I do not know." The ordinary philosopher utters this with indifference; the saint that-is-to-be says it with a suffering-laden heart. The worldly man pays no heed. What is it to him if the whole world of idealism and tradition falls! What if everything of early belief fails! He is oblivious to the suffering which disillusion involves. For he is dead in soul, caring only for the world and the business of the senses and living in the social structures built thereupon. While the idealist, who is the mystic in the making, soars into the empyrean of intelligence, searching with a great hunger of soul for everlasting truth.

India has remained the same and Hinduism is, essentially, the same as it was before the oncoming and overwhelming

crush of things that Western education brought in its wake. This is because some great souls born within the bounds of Hinduism suffered, bearing the brunt of the tidal wave of foreign thought which threatened to flood the historic structure of Hinduism with foreign creed and foreign culture. And of those who suffered, passing through a veritable tempest of thought, was Noren, who became the Swami Vivekananda, the Apostle of a Revivified Hinduism, and the Redeemer of the Hindu world. His intellectual pain and imperious demand for living truth were equal to the most terrible asceticism of the mystical life. For, in his case, the search was a crying-out in the darkness, a losing of the way, a struggling with unknown conditions which sometimes overpower the mind and will to believe. It is crucifixion and sorrow. Through Noren's tempest of thought, the Hindu consciousness let forth, as it were, all its doubting and agony of search into and beyond the group of agnostic beliefs,—for even the agnostic position is a position of belief. Through the individual experience of Noren the Hindu consciousness examined, as it were, its own presentation of beliefs and phases of reality; it studied, with scrutinising and scrupulous analysis, its inherent potentialities and truth as matched and compared with other foreign systems of faith and knowledge.

Noren suffered the agonies of doubt and the torture of search in the dark, when all hope seemed to have fled and utmost despair was at hand—not alone for the redemption of the Hindu world, but for the resurrection of religion in the Western world as well. It was because he had suffered, and subsequently understood that world of reality which is the Divine Nature, that he could stand, rooted in spiritual convictions as a man of realisation and as a teacher among all teachers, before that august assembly, the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in America in the autumn of the year 1893. And because of this surety of comprehension he possessed, it was not strange that ten thousand persons should do him honour as to a Master, rising instinctively to their feet as one man,

when he addressed them as "Sisters and Brothers of America," and had not as yet uttered one single word of his luminous message. For he had gone beneath their philosophies, having seen, through the mists of much thought and the veils of human learning and much suffering of soul, verily, into the Eyes of God. And then, also, he had sensed the Peace that passeth all understanding, and was fixed in that Immovable and Unchangeable Insight,—the Beatific Vision of the Soul.



XXIV

IN VARIOUS MOODS.

Ever since Noren studied in the Entrance class, he regularly applied himself to music under the able tutelage of Ahammad Khan, a Mohammedan, and Beni Gupta, two celebrated teachers in both vocal and instrumental music. It was at the earnest suggestion of his father that Noren set himself to the task of mastering the science. He desired that Noren should become learned in the technique and detail of Indian 'music, for he realised that the musical genius without thorough training, never attained proficiency. Therefore during the long time of four or five years Noren gave himself up to music, devoting more time to this than to his collegiate studies. He excelled in song, though he could play musical instruments as well. Wherever he went he was asked to sing, everybody appreciating him in the light of a professional singer. He was recognised as an authority, and his ideas upon Indian music as he developed them by contrast with the music of the West, have made him prominent as a musical critic. His teachers recognising in him a musical genius, gave him not only formal lessons but their entire devotion. From the Mohammedan he learned many Hindusthani, Urdu and Persian songs, some of the latter being those which are sung by Mohammedans, with dancing and religious abandonment, on their great festival days.

Noren, like other singers, learned also how to dance with surprising grace. In this the Orientals resemble the Greeks in that they consider dancing as a manly art and use it for religious purposes. And Noren, it must be said, was possessed of the artistic mood whenever he danced, giving way joyously to the spiritual emotions which held him at the time. There was always something Greek in him. His

whole spirit, so far as the emotional nature was concerned, was saturated with the Greek love for beauty and symbolism. Expression, with him, during this period of growth, came gradually to mean the representation of the thought-worlds and moods of feeling in perfect and beautiful physical counterparts, and as his nature became gradually spiritualised, his whole expression was that of the body *in the service of the soul*. Indeed, he was the Greek; and when he later on came under the influence of his religious master, he was surrounded at all times, as it were, by an atmosphere such as might have graced the personality of the Priests of the Oracles. He adored Beauty even from his boyhood; but as he grew older and understood the relationship between the Beauty of Nature and the Divinity of the Soul which interprets it, he gave himself up to its Higher Call, going beyond the senses, as did Uma when She became the Beloved One of Shiva who refused even to notice Her until She had subordinated the Beauty of Form to the Beauty of the Spirit. And subsequently he came to understand Beauty even in the Terrible; and in this later light he saw the Sameness of Personality between the beautiful Uma-Gouri-Haimavati and the Terrible Forms of Mā Kālī. He was indeed the Greek, but he even at this time unconsciously took in a wider definition of Beauty than that of sense or pleasure. He was more than Greek also, in the sense that so far as he himself was concerned he never dragged the Ideal into the form. To his mind the Ideal was always the Spirit of forms, and music was the first and incipient method. It was for him the doorway to the Temple of the Goddess Sarasvati, and the anteroom, indeed, to the Presence of the Highest.

Personally, he was an Apollo in appearance, and Greek in this. And when he sang, his personality and voice became united in a strange oneness of vibration and in a fineness of spiritual beauty and unity. Whenever a merry party formed itself in these days amongst those who knew him, it was invariably thought incomplete without him as the chief entertainer, for he made things gay and abandoned himself to fun.

And he had a fine collection of songs which befitted such occasions as these when, freeing himself from all seriousness and all the cares through which he was passing, he would sojourn in the Land of Delights, soaring thither on the wings of song. He became a favourite with everybody. Even men partial to a thorough masculine nature, appreciated the delicacy and grace of his personality, and the beauty and the sweetness of his voice which had a wide range. When a party had been made up and Noren had not put in his appearance in time, the others waiting for him would ask those with whom he had planned to come, "O! Where is Noren! Why didn't you bring Noren with you?" And until he came the party would be dull; and if he failed to come at all, oftentimes it would be broken up and the project of fun abandoned. Indeed, Noren was the savoury element in all innocent merry-making. It is wrong to imagine that he had no love for pleasure. He was thoroughly human and delighted in the ways of human life and in all the pleasure he could wring from life. All through his college career, "He was a good old soul," in the language of his companions, "and he delighted us with his long, long stories, wit and fun-making. He always went in for all kinds of exercise and hobbies."

Noren was loved even for his physical personality alone. There was a certain leonine splendour about him, a certain light-heartedness and a certain nonchalance of spirit. He had the faculty of completely abandoning himself. And he allowed himself all freedom for fun. His family encouraged him in his energetic play and exercises. For during his college life he showed the first symptoms of that disease which, checked now and again, ultimately spread its ravages through his entire form and brought about his early demise. This disease—a malignant form of diabetes—was the curse of the family, several members having died of it. Nevertheless, he was full of physical vitality and hoped to "work" the disease away; and he succeeded in doing so to a large extent, for had it not been for his manly sports and peculiarly jolly

temperament the disease would have made irreparable headway in the earliest years of his manhood.

Even to look at him gave his friends joy, and when he amused them with tales, or spoke to them of Occidental philosophies, differentiating one from the other, they were interested; and when he chaffed them, making witty remarks, they were not offended; and when he sang, they were beside themselves with joy, and the whole audience would join him in a chorus. For he was possessed not alone of fine technique but of exquisite modulation of tone, and the devotee of Beauty within him inspired him to ecstasy in singing, irrespective of the character of song, as he was in love with song for its own sake. And with gestures and smiles and with light in his eyes, or at other times with a wonderful stillness of body and a great gravity of personality, he would follow the text of the song. His teachers congratulated themselves with having a student of his genius who displayed such readiness and aptitude; and they also knew that, best of all, he was possessed in a remarkable manner of that particular element in the composition of all musical geniuses—a striking personality. Noren always entertained his friends with song; and their encouragement and constant call for an “encore,” would raise him to the highest pitch of expression of his genius. Hours would be consumed in this way. And it is told how even when alone, he frequently gave himself up to the mood of singing with such passion and ecstasy that he would forget the passing of time and even his food. Sometimes before he bathed, he would begin singing when rubbing himself with oil in the fashion of the Greeks and all Orientals. He might be in a great hurry, but having once commenced, he would lose himself in the singing, becoming more and more mindless of his bath, forgetting that the time for his food was drawing nearer and nearer. This showed a wonderful innate power of concentration of personality which he later used dynamically, in the days of his relationship with his spiritual master, for attaining far-reaching realisation.

It was, indeed, in these days that Noren gained the fundamental training and first expression of a quality which proved to be one of the most pleasing and useful characteristics of his personality, in later life,—a beautifully well-toned, finely-balanced and harmonious voice, not only in singing, but in common speech as well. For as the Swami Vivekananda, his message rang out all the clearer and all the more impressive because of his voice. Many came to his lectures in the West, attracted only by the power and the beauty of his voice and delivery. During this period he likewise practised declamation ; but by his very nature he was an orator. He was, as it were, born a son of Sarasvati, the Goddess of speech and learning.

When Noren was serious, he seemed a philosopher, shrouded in the solitude and the inscrutable grandeur of intellectual life ; but when he gave himself up to amusement, he did so in no half-hearted way. One of his favourite pastimes was to ride a white pony every evening during the time it was left by a relative in his care. He had a great love for horses. As for his studies, were it not for the testimony of many of those who still live to bear witness, the readiness, tenacity and range of his memory seem almost incredible. It is said of him that having once read a book, he could quote at length from it during the rest of his life. Often during his college career, after spending the whole day in amusement with his friends, he would plunge late at night into reading forty or fifty pages in an hour of complex historical or philosophical treatises and emerge from his midnight labour, having made them a permanent possession of his mind. In this intense and spontaneous intellectual effort he drank much tea and coffee, to which beverages he became greatly addicted, finding them, as many scholars have, a stimulus to severe mental labour. All through his life he found his brain clear, even when his health was impaired and he was physically weak. This was wonderful when one considers the terrible strain of thought to which he frequently subjected himself ;

but had he not been possessed of a remarkable, well-balanced brain and steady nerve, he could never have become the Teacher, Vivekananda. In the latter days of his life he used to say, "Though my body is worn out, my brain is as clear as ever !"

At this time of his life he was going through one of the most trying episodes of his mental experience in seeking an adjustment between his mind and Truth, and between his emotional nature tending to belief and his intellectual nature which tended constantly to disbelief. His parents were most anxious for his health. Several times during his early life he showed signs of a breakdown, due to malarial fever, specially when he had passed the Entrance Examination of the Calcutta University. At this juncture his father and his uncle took him to Gaya for a change which proved salutary to him. The symptoms of diabetes becoming now apparent, his parents attempted to dissuade him from his serious moods into light amusements. They had planned marriage for him. They told Noren that he should go to England and prepare himself for a course in law and also for admission into the Indian Civil Service. This was a cherished ambition with Noren in those days. But when Sri Ramakrishna heard of his parent's proposals, he was severely against them. He prayed to the Mother of the Universe to avoid what he considered a dread calamity to his chief disciple's spiritual career. Noren suddenly changed his attitude, and though threats were made of expulsion from his home, they produced no effect. Sri Ramakrishna had then captured Noren's whole field of consciousness and had saturated it with living spirituality by a process yet to be heard of. Noren's own brother truly says, "He had a constitutional dislike for the married life, so far as he himself was concerned."

He led an ascetic life during the time in which he made preparations for the examination for the degree of Bachelorship of Arts, and meditated half the night. And many times he invited wandering Sannyāsins to come and sing and talk

to him. At this time he was living in his grandmother's house near by, in order that he might pursue his studies without being disturbed by the noise of the younger children in his own home. Here also he would discuss problems of social evolution as these applied to Indian life, until his face was ablaze with enthusiasm, and the young men who were with him cried out, "Why, Noren ! You are wonderful ! You certainly have a great future before you !" Noren's natural tendency to the ascetic life was clearly marked out. He was possessed of a strange consciousness, functioning dually, it might be said ; conterminously he was the monk in the making and the jubilant lover of life. He had the physical temperament of a free child with the intellectual temperament of a gigantic soul in the revelation. Though surrounded almost constantly by a retinue of servants at his father's house, and having his slightest wishes fulfilled at a moment's notice, he would often spend days at the house of some poor friend where, amidst simplicity and dire poverty, he felt himself really more at home.

It was about this time that he had thrown himself heart and soul into the Spencerian philosophy, and wrote to Herbert Spencer himself, criticising certain points in his philosophy. The great man replied, praising and encouraging him, even going so far as to write that he would modify the ideas in question in a future edition of his work. This gave Noren a great stimulus, making him intellectually self-possessed. Professor W. W. Hastie, the most learned among the English scholars in India at the time, who was Noren's tutor in philosophy and, also, the Principal of the General Assembly's Institution, spoke of him in flattering terms, saying to others, "Norendra Nath Dutta is really a genius ! I have travelled far and wide, but I have never yet come across a lad of his talents and possibilities, even in the German universities, amongst philosophical students. He is bound to make a mark in life !" Noren himself believed that he was *destined* for great things. He was convinced in his heart that he had a great future before him.

Often his soul went up in prayer and his thought in meditation ; and he added, in these days, the "Imitation of Christ," by Thomas à Kempis, to the list of those religious writings in which he was then specially interested. Verily, his was a strange personality made up of varying moods and various qualities, but at heart there was a well-spring of sincerity, whose constant flow was bound to bring his soul out from darkness into Light.

In mischievous fun a boy, in song an artist, in intellectual pursuits a scholar, and in his outlook on life a philosopher, Noren was unique amongst the young men of his time.

A FELLOW-STUDENT'S REMINISCENCES.

To gain a still clearer perspective of Noren's personality and the early stage of his mental development, it would be well to quote the observations of one of his fellow-students, Brajendra Nath Seal, who has since become one of the leading intellects of India. He says in an article written for the *Prabuddha Bharata* in 1907 :

"When I first met Vivekananda in 1881 we were fellow-students of Principal William Hastie, scholar, metaphysician, and poet, at the General Assembly's College. He was my senior in age, though I was his senior in the College by one year. Undeniably a gifted youth, sociable, free and unconventional in manners, a sweet singer, the soul of social circles, a brilliant conversationalist, somewhat bitter and caustic, piercing with the shafts of a keen wit the shows and mummeries of the world, sitting in the scorner's chair but hiding the tenderest of hearts under that garb of cynicism; altogether an inspired Bohemian but possessing what Bohemians lack, an iron will; somewhat peremptory and absolute, speaking with accents of authority and withal possessing a strange power of the eye which could hold his listeners in thrall.

"This was patent to all. But what was known to few was the inner man and his struggles,—the *stürm und drang* of soul which expressed itself in his restless and Bohemian wanderings.

"This was the beginning of a critical period in his mental history, during which he awoke to self-consciousness, and laid the foundations of his future personality. John Stuart Mill's 'Three Essays on Religion' had upset his first boyish theism and easy optimism which he had imbibed from the outer circles of the Brahmo Samaj. The arguments from

causality and design were for him broken reeds to lean upon, and he was haunted by the problem of the Evil in Nature and Man which he, by no means, could reconcile with the goodness of an All-wise and All-powerful Creator. A friend introduced him to the study of Hume's Scepticism and Herbert Spencer's doctrine of the Unknowable, and his unbelief gradually assumed the form of a settled philosophical scepticism.

"His first emotional freshness and *naïveté* were worn out. A certain dryness and incapacity for the old prayerful devotions, an *ennui* which he concealed under a *nonchalant* air of habitual mocking and scoffing, troubled his spirit. But music still stirred him as nothing else could, and gave him a weird unearthly sense of unseen realities which brought tears to his eyes.

"It was at this time that he came to me being brought by a common friend, the same who had introduced him to the study of Hume and Herbert Spencer. I had had a nodding acquaintance with him before, but now he opened himself to me and spoke of his harassing doubts and his despair of reaching certitude about the Ultimate Reality. He asked for a course of Theistic philosophic reading suited to a beginner in his situation. I named some authorities, but the stock arguments of the Intuitionists and the Scotch common-sense school only confirmed him in his unbelief. Besides, he did not appear to me to have sufficient patience for humdrum reading,—his faculty was to imbibe not so much from books as from living communion and personal experience. With him it was 'life kindling life and thought kindling thought.'

"I felt deeply drawn towards him, for I now knew that he would grapple with difficulties in earnest.

"I gave him a course of readings in Shelley. Shelley's Hymn to the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty, his pantheism of impersonal love and his vision of a glorified millennial humanity moved him as the arguments of the philosophers had failed to move him. The universe was no longer a mere

lifeless, loveless mechanism. It contained a spiritual principle of unity.

"I spoke to him now of a higher unity than Shelley had conceived, the unity of the Para Brahman as the Universal Reason. My own position at that time sought to fuse into one, three essential elements, the pure monism of the Vedanta, the dialectics of the Absolute idea of Hegel and the Gospel of Equality, Liberty and Fraternity of the French Revolution. The principle of individuation was with me the principle of Evil. The Universal Reason was all in all, Nature, life, history being the progressive unfolding of the Absolute idea. All ethical, social and political creeds and principles were to be tested by their conformity to Pure Reason. The element of feeling appeared to me merely pathological, a disturbance of sanity and order. How to overcome the resistance of matter, of individuality and of unreason, to the manifestation of the Pure Reason was the great problem of life and society, of education and legislation. I also held with the ardour of a young inexperienced visionary that the deliverance of the Race from the bondage of unreason would come about through a new revolutionary polity of which the watchwords were Equality, Liberty and Fraternity.

"The sovereignty of Universal Reason, and the negation of the individual as the principle of morals, were ideas that soon came to satisfy Vivekananda's intellect and gave him an assured conquest over scepticism and materialism. What was more, they furnished him with the card and compass of life, as it were. But this brought him no peace. The conflict now entered deeper into his soul, for the creed of Universal Reason called on him to suppress the yearnings and susceptibilities of his artist nature and Bohemian temperament. His senses were keen and acute, his natural cravings and passions strong and imperious, his youthful susceptibilities tender, his conviviality free and merry. To suppress these was to kill his natural spontaneity,—almost to suppress his self. The struggle soon took a seriously ethical turn,—reason struggling for mastery with passion and sense. The fascina-

tions of the sense and the cravings of a youthful nature now appeared to him as impure, as gross and carnal. This was the hour of darkest trial for him. His musical gifts brought him associates for whose manners and morals he had bitter and undisguised contempt. But his convivial temperament proved too strong for him. It was, therefore, some relief to him when I occasionally kept him company of an evening when he went out for a musical *soirée*

"I saw and recognised in him a high, ardent and pure nature vibrant and resonant with impassioned sensibilities. He was certainly no sour or cross-grained puritan, no moral hypochondriac;—he would indulge cynically in unconventional language except when he would spare my innocence. He took an almost morbid delight in shocking conventionality in its tabernacles, respectability in its booths; and in the pursuit of his sport would appear other than he was, puzzling and mystifying those outside his inner circle of friends. But in the recesses of his soul he wrestled with the fierce and fell spirit of Desire, the subtle and illusive spirit of Fancy."

"To his repeated quest for some power which would deliver him from bondage and unavailing struggle, I could only point to the sovereignty of Pure Reason and the ineffable peace that comes of identifying the self with the Reason in the Universe. Those were for me days of a victorious Platonic transcendentalism. The experience of a refractory flesh or rebellious temperament had not come to me. I had not sufficient patience for the mood or attitude of mind which surrenders the sovereign right of self-government to artificial props or outside help, such as grace or mediation. I felt no need of conciliating feeling and nature in the cult of Reason, nor had had any experience of a will divided in its allegiance to the Self. The experience of a discord between the Ideal and the Real, between nature and Spirit, had indeed come to me already in an objective way as an outstanding reality and was to come afterwards in subjective fashion, though in forms quite other than what obtained in Vivekananda's case. But

at the time, his problems were not mine, nor were my difficulties his.

"He confessed that though his intellect was conquered by the universal, his heart owned the allegiance of the individual Ego and complained that a pale, bloodless reason, sovereign *de jure* but not *de facto*, could not hold out arms to save him in the hour of temptation. He wanted to know if my philosophy could satisfy his senses, could mediate bodily, as it were, for the soul's deliverance; in short, he wanted a flesh and blood reality visible in form and glory; above all he cried out for a hand to save, to uplift, to protect, a *sakti* or power outside himself which could cure him of his impotence and cover his nothingness with glory,—a *guru* or master who by embodying perfection in the flesh would still the commotion in his soul.

"At the time, this appeared to me a weakness born of unreason, this demand for perfection in the flesh and for a power out of ourselves to save,—this sacrifice of reason to sense. My young inexperienced self, confronted with this demand of a soul striving with itself, knew not wherewith to satisfy it, and Vivekananda soon after betook himself to the ministers and missionaries of the Brahmo Samāj, asking Brahmos with an unconscious Socratic Irony, for an ideal made real to sense, for truth made visible, for a power unto deliverance. Here he had enough, he bitterly complained, of moral disquisitions, principles, intuitions for pabulum which to him appeared tasteless and insipid. He tried diverse teachers, creeds and cults, and it was this quest that brought him, though at first in a doubting spirit, to the Paramahansa of Dakshineswar, who spoke to him with an authority as none had spoken before, and by his *sakti* brought peace into his soul and healed the wounds of his spirit. But his rebellious intellect scarcely yet owned the Master. His mind misgave him and he doubted if the peace which would possess his soul in the presence of the Master was not illusory. It was only gradually that the doubts of that keen intellect were vanquished

by the calm assurance that belongs to ocular demonstration.

"I watched with intense interest the transformation that went on under my eyes. The attitude of a young and rampant Vedantist—*cum*-Hegelian-*cum*-Revolutionary like myself towards the cult of religious ecstasy and Kali-worship, may be easily imagined ; and the spectacle of a born iconoclast and freethinker like Vivekananda, a creative and dominating intelligence, a tamer of souls, himself caught in the meshes of what appeared to me an uncouth, supernatural mysticism, was a riddle which my philosophy of the Pure Reason could scarcely read at the time. But Vivekananda, "the loved and lost" was loved and mourned most in what I could not but then regard as his defection; and it was personal feeling, after all, the hated pathological element of individual preference and individual relationship, which most impelled me, when at last I went on what to a home-keeping recluse like myself was an adventurous journey to Dakshinashwar, to see and hear Vivekananda's Master, and spent the greater part of a long summer day in the shady and peaceful solitudes of the Temple-garden, returning as the sun set amidst the whirl and rush and roar and the awful gloom of a blinding thunder-storm, with a sense of bewilderment as well moral as physical, and a lurking perception of the truth that the majesty of Law orders the apparently irregular and grotesque, that there may be self-mastery in apparent self-alienation, that sense even in its errors is only incipient Reason and that faith in a Saving Power *ab extra* is but the dim reflex of an original act of self-determination. And a significant confirmation of all this came in the subsequent life-history of Vivekananda who, after he had found the firm assurance he sought in the saving Grace and Power of his Master, went about preaching and teaching the creed of the Universal Man, and the absolute and inalienable sovereignty of the Self."



XXVI.

THE MAN IN THE MAKING.

Slow, at first, are the pulsations of the heart that is being awakened ; and the mind pauses in the work of its own development, for understanding is faint and the heart is not yet unfolded. The death of the play-days must first come to pass. Then the intellectual life comes with their passing. A new world is in the making, the world of youth—a world of aspirations, a world of glorious intentions, a world of the beginning of things which later make the personal transfiguration. With everyone there is the perennial tendency to greater things. The perspective may be the farmhouse or the battle-field ; it may be the throne or the student's life, but it comes ; and according as the tendency is directed into the currents of expression does the life become unfolded in the degree of intensity and realisation. With some the tendency may perish and they are dead, as it were, though living in the body. With some the tendency blossoms forth into the highest fruition and the life becomes the beacon-call to supreme greatness. Even so is it with religion and the religious temperament.

The day dawns in youth when the mind throws off the discipline of necessity and wanders in original paths, either for good or evil. The discipline of necessity must be transcended for that self-discipline which comes because the soul aspires to a loftier realisation. For the discipline of necessity, acquired through the rigorous supervision of others over one's morality, if not surmounted by the understanding and following of the personal perception of the uses and needs of morality, is broken by the will which is possessed of no personal initiative. Unless the moral struggle becomes a matter of the individual conscience, the personality stumbles because the props have been removed.

Noren learned, at home, the need of having the larger view, that is, to do whatever is to be done because the mind sees and understands the fitness of the doing. He saw, in his early years, that what the mind is compelled to do from external pressure ceases when that pressure is relaxed or removed and there is no whip of discipline and no prison of circumstances that can make life safe. The freedom of the will, he was taught, is the bottom-rock of all true self-development,—but that freedom of the will must be added to and supported by a righteous and developed discrimination. With these two cardinal factors as qualifications above all others, progress is sure because, though a man may err he does not err from a perverseness of will but from a shortness of insight. Such erring is corrected through experience. For this reason the Swami Vivekananda said in that unusual manner of conviction he had with him, that he was proud of his own mistakes, because his vision had expanded through them. He spoke of sinners as teachers in disguise, because he felt that he had learned much from them. He saw that only in experience lies the correction of instinct and not in fine theories or much given advice. Thus he was conscious of the sinner as the saint in the making. These convictions of the last days of his youth became the splendid insight of the years of his manhood. He recognised that the sincerity of the sinner in his sins and the intensity and depth of his emotional nature, directed into spiritual channels, became swift guides to higher realisation.

His training at home and a certain originality of forethought made him, of himself, see the fitness of the moral life. Thus he was emancipated from serving the moral law as a slave serves. Above all, he possessed that wonderful and rare qualification for the attainment and complete mastership of the spiritual consciousness,—a positive passion for good. He felt that though the mind might have plunged into the depths of agnosticism, there was no need of translating that intellectual state into emotional materialism and into a thoroughly sensuous outlook, as all worldly

persons would, making a little learning an excuse for much sinning. It was better to stem the tide-flows of the senses and at least be like a god in that effort and thereby realistically assert the superiority of the heart's vision over that of the mind, making the inner man of spiritual potentialities triumph over the limitations of the physical.

For this reason he became the ascetic for a time, denying himself much that he could have rightfully possessed. He slept upon the floor with a coarse cloth for covering and wore the borderless *dhooti* which is the sign of simplicity, of age, of widowhood and of renunciation. This asceticism was all the more significant because then he was not yet sure of, he did not quite know, intellectually, the truth of the verities of the soul. Though agnostic, he was as ascetic as the most zealous monk. With him, as with certain other great men, the heart took the lead of the intellect, and he followed the former instinctively. As the result, the spiritualisation of the intellect came all the sooner and all the more intensely. The family urged upon Noren worldly considerations, even going to the length of planning for his marriage; but strange to say, each time the matter was arranged, some unforeseen difficulty cropped up or some turn of events would occur which completely stopped all further proceedings. And the very last time the family proposed marriage for him and had made final arrangements in this respect, the father died suddenly, as has been seen. The inward spiritual impetus was strong in Noren. It is not strange, therefore, to find him rising from his study, when he was preparing for the B. L. examination, and say to a friend in a way that caused much anxious surprise, "Yes, I must abandon the idea of appearing for the examination. What does it all mean! I must be free!" With this remark he passed into a reverie and then hastened from his home to the Garden at Cossipore where his spiritual teacher lay ill, and returned to his home only after many days. Early in youth he thought of marriage as a barrier to the opportunity of true self-exploration and self-consciousness, spirit-

ually speaking. He was overpowered by the master-impulse to sound the profundity of being that dwells incarnate in the deeps of personality. He was possessed by the spirit of all the ages and all the aspiration of religions,—unknownly to himself perhaps. Therefore he said to this same friend, "You are married. You are under the bondage of the householder's life. I am free. Mine will be the monastic life, I am sure." Of course to understand Noren's words, one must forego the worldly and social understanding of marriage, one must enter into that world of feeling which was his, one must see through his perspective of life. He knew life to be a dream. His very agnosticism had impressed him with the meaninglessness of all things. Therefore he looked upon the monastic life as the only method of protest against the falseness of it all. At least he would not permit the intellectual elements of the agnostic spirit to be translated into the emotional terms of a life lived for the mere sake of living. He would let personality die out, as it were, striving only for truth, living for truth, even though its revelations be solely intellectual, bearing no stimulus to the emotional consciousness. He would be the monk, even though the fountain of inspiration from which he drew the stimulus to renunciation was, to all intents and purposes, dried up. Unconsciously, even in the stage of severe agnosticism, Noren was the monk; he was always,—always the monk!

The great curb to final realisation, at this epoch in his career, was the unintermittent questioning of the intellect. And yet the intellect must be silenced before the mystical state can dawn upon such a mind as Noren possessed. It must be silenced, however, not by stunting its growth by accepting any casual belief or any stage of knowledge, not by suppressing it as one would an evil thought or an evil desire,—but by one's having reached the highest fulfilment of its capacity and faculty. It must have dealt successfully with all phases of doubt and of uncertainty and come to understand the perception of reality as a function of the

soul, using the emotional power, educated and perfected, as the means whereby the goal is to be reached. Then the intellect joins with the soul in the living of the spiritual life. The intellect has then become the footstool of the soul, the worthy servant in the pilgrimage to God.

Belief is tyranny unless it is that larger vision in which the mind stands on the pinnacle of its most advanced comprehension, intellectually speaking, and in which it glimpses, through the perspective of faith, the wider range of realities which it will sometime come to know. The soul must be free; the mind must be free. This was Noren's position. Spirituality must result, not from the discipline of necessity, not from any extraneous coercion, or the unconscious and unquestioning assimilation of traditional faith, but from a vigorous questioning and a righteous doubting as to the reasons and the demands for belief, on the part of the intellectual self. He fought every inch of the way, accepting nothing until it was proved conclusively, to his mind, as true. When he gained any point it was, consequently, an irrevocable comprehension. It was insight. Verily, it was illumination.

Somehow he was a seer of his own destiny and future. He would say amazing things of himself, not as the visionary, but as the prophet. He foretold his greatness in the modest language of a recollected soul. For while he thus spoke of himself, he was also working out in his own nature the problems which are always a world's concern, the solution of which he later embodied in his message, aye, and about the solution of which mighty religious systems gather. He struggled, he suffered in thought and in his heart, but he instinctively foresaw the victory underlying all his intellectual pain and questioning. He seemed, instinctively, to know that the *way out* would be found, and that he would cross this ocean of darkness of thought safely and reach to the other shore where wisdom rests and peace abides. It might be said that even in these days he was the monk, a doubting monk he might be, but one who called intensely and persistently on That Which was Reality to reveal Itself to him. And he knew that

the latent monastic self would some day burst on his agnostic mind and he would be the victorious monk, dwelling in that Reality which he later on found as God. He was pure in heart, and of such Jesus the Christ said, that they *shall* see God. Underlying all the conscious efforts of Noren was the heart which knew, in some strange method of foretelling, that real, beatific knowledge would come as the triumphant climax to all that striving through which his intellectual self had struggled and suffered. The seership was to be his!

He demanded the right of freedom in the education he was undergoing, the self-education of the soul through all the mazes of varied struggle and vigorous analysis. How different this, from those orthodox systems of religion which demand faith at the cost of intellectual and personal freedom, thereby breeding superstition, and its offspring, fanaticism! Noren wanted the great vision and the deep understanding, in the mental self as well as in the emotional and spiritual selves. The heart, however, is always the forerunner, and sometimes it is impatient at the long cycles of doubt and scrutiny through which the intellectual man must pass; and this makes the essence of suffering and struggle. But when the ground has been gained in both directions, what strength of realisation comes! The world cannot hold back the soul with a message thus founded. It is good to undergo both phases, and particularly that of the intellect, because the age makes the demand that the foundation of thought, from which the soul will ascend into the divine life and consciousness of the Self shall be sound.

Man-making is a matter of experience, which is the only true teacher. The soul that longs cannot be content with the pleasure of feeling proximate to the object of its quest. It must possess. Noren insisted that knowledge,—sure, real, permanent, satisfactory knowledge—must eventually be the goal, when doubt would no longer reign, and resplendent truth would shine forth in all the divinity of Reality. Belief must give way to realisation. Even intellectual illumination must go before the radiance of the clearest vision. But this

method of determined seeking for truth made vision all the clearer and all the surer ; and because of all this intellectual tribulation did the note of his message ring all the truer and with more convincing force, for he had realised within the enclosure of his own experience, that the soul *can* triumph over all the stress of circumstance and all the barriers of ignorance and darkness that stand between the divine truth and the struggle thereunto. Even now, even in all this confusion of intellect and agnosticism Noren practised, as of old before the image of the Lord of monks, that training of the spiritual self, which is meditation. For some reason, known only to himself, he continued this spiritual exercise. Perhaps it was because of the great mental peace which came upon him as he tried to quiet the mind in that form of worship which meditation embodied. Perhaps it was a rest to his brain which seethed with ideas. Perhaps, in the state of meditation, his heart reached out apprehending, through the power of emotion, that certainty of the spiritual consciousness into which his mind refused to enter until irrevocably and incontrovertibly assured. And in that state, when great silence and great stillness came, he would sometimes pass into the innermostness of his nature. There the doubting mind could not approach, and there we find the visions of old arising before him from the depths of the spiritual self, perhaps not so defined or regular ; but, here and there, would come to him a mass of light, forming itself, as in other days, into the strange triangle of light, so frequent in religious symbolism and which is of such immense theological meaning. Then Noren was jubilant. This was not thought ; it was experience. He saw these glorious foreshadowings of abstract truth in the silence of meditation and in its illuminated consciousness, which is of the life of God,—the life, self-sustained, self-sufficient, undying, undecayable and indestructible. In the personality of Noren the state of an agnostic mind and of a spiritual emotional self were strangely and paradoxically blended. But it is not difficult to

discern the seer under the garb of that agnostic mind. For agnosticism stops in the midst of darkness, unable to make further explorations into the realms of truth ; it acknowledges self-defeat thinking it futile to proceed further. Beyond its present outlook it sees only darkness swallowed up by darkness. But in Noren was the *determination* to seek and find, and of such said the Teacher of old, blessed are they, for they shall find.

Time passed, and the days became landmarks of varied higher experiences. Thoughts upon thoughts visited Noren becoming vivid realities, and thinking was transformed into a process of feeling. And there stand out in his nature at this time, above all other things, the persistent longing for the realisation of freedom and the determination to find truth at all costs, even at the cost of pain and disillusion.

The man is seen in the making, inflexible with regard to himself in the search for reality. All the passionate longing and all the passionate depth, which, with ordinary persons, are a matter of the senses, were in the case of Noren directed to the understanding of life in connection with the problems it presented. Thus in the distance of the years of his early manhood one catches the echo of that refrain which was the prayer of his life, " O Lord, that same intensity of love which one has for the fleeting objects of the senses, may that same intensity of love be directed on my part to Thee ! " Such was his prayer, and such, also, had been the prayer of the king of devotees, Prahlâd.

Noren, at this time, was largely by himself and with his own thought, developing that solitude of mind which made him stand upon his own strength in deciphering the purposes of the mysteries of life. It made him independent in his ways of thinking. Even physically his life was being spiritualised, so one might say. All the purport and all the energies of his personality were streaming with irresistible speed into the river of greater and greater knowledge, making ultimately for that realisation which he was to know and which has since sped into the ocean of the Divine consciousness. And

all these things went into the fulness of his message, which has since become as nectar to many who have found reality in its contents and a nobler vision of truth and life.

Man-making is the transfiguration of the innate tendency into the purpose for which the soul takes human birth ; it is also in the final expression of this purpose that man stands revealed with his message. With Noren the period of man-making was the period of transition when the play-thoughts of boyhood and the aspirations and joyous efforts of youth were being moulded into the sublime and defined lines of a perfected character. The ideal aspiration had become the real struggle for seeing ; and already there were shadows of what were to appear, in all their radiance, as the effulgent forms of spiritual awareness. At bottom was the indomitable basis of sincerity. And where there is sincerity and where there is effort, there *must* come realisation. Noren was founding the structure of his spiritual consciousness upon the solid bed-rock of sincerity and honesty of search. And when the structure of the soul is so placed, the winds of misfortune may blow and the storms of life may beat against it, but it is stronger than the winds and the storms, and nothing can shake or destroy it.

The vision passes before the mind, and one is caught up with the spirit of Noren in a world where all is sweetly and spiritually serious and where the soul is endeavouring to see, however faintly, the Beatific Vision of the Self. Already the notes of Realisation are heard and the Word of Revelation is at hand.

XXVII.

THE COMING OF THE LIGHT.

The weaving of the web of a great personality is a wonderful and unique process. The days are the weavers and each experience a thread in the weaving. Intellect and heart, together with their variations, are the warp and the woof. In order, however, that the personality woven be grand in the spiritual stature and transfigured into the highest, there must be, behind the intellect and heart, the impetus of the awakening soul. Thought and emotion are the steeds, the chariot is the personality and the charioteer is the soul. The old mandate rings clear as coming from the mouth of the Sage who walked, like a wandering monk, amongst the hills and vales and the deserts of Judæa, "What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose (the vision of) his own (immortal) soul." This is the parable-manner of declaring that same truth, spoken of by other sages in the ancient days of India, "All this is *Mâyâ*, the Unreal. That alone is worth while which is Real!"

Sojourning in the desert of thought, where rise the images of doubt and uncertainty which promise but to betray, Noren knew in his heart that what the world called knowledge was only speculation, as it were, of a more extensive kind and that, overshadowing the whole of life was the cloud of the unknowable, aye, and that everywhere were the forms and shadows of ignorance. He thought as did Jesus the Christ, "What can all the world of learning give unto man in lieu of his own self, his own soul!" Thus Noren's mind had been swept by a tempest of desolation, whose origin was the search for reality. But he assembled all the forces of his thought, continuing to plunge deeper and deeper into the books embodying the wisdom of man, only to find that it was with himself even as it was with Solomon, the

king, who found all worldly knowledge and experience to be but "a vanity and vexation of spirit." A shadow of gloom rested over Noren. His mind was chilled after that veritable tempest through which he had passed. The mind had torn down the wide roads of thought at a maddened speed, exhausting itself in the effort. Then the personality paused in deep reflection and in solemn silence. What was to be? Now that the excitement of thought had ceased, what was to engage the personality of Noren? Underneath the surface consciousness—and even here and there, through several conscious elements of intention and character—the monastic spirit was visible. That seemed the deep, though faint, note in the dawn of a Great Becoming.

Far, far in the distance shines, as the light eternal, the light of the spiritually illumined consciousness. It comes, in sincere searching, when the night of the mind is darkest ; it comes as the sure and certain dawn, the breaking of another day of life,—the day eternal, when peace is born of surest knowledge and knowledge comes, of itself, as the waters well up from a fountain.

Slowly, slowly, but surely came the expansion of thought. From the critical attitude of mind, Noren drifted into the searching attitude. He had turned over the tables of belief and tradition. The critical faculty had had its full sway, leaving the mind dark ; and in that darkness the inmost self reached out for positive and constructive thought. He commenced the search for purpose and reality in the structure of life ; and thus, in the process, the period of the deification of life dawned for him. He thought, how can life be sentient and That from which life comes be non-sentient ! Call That the Unknowable, still the mystery is not lessened in sublimity and meaning and inscrutability. So deep is the meaning of That from which life springs, that the human mind gathering, into one single whole, all its ideals of the greatness and goodness and truth of manifested things, has always concentrated them about this Mystery, deifying it above all the ordinary definitions that man applies to the visible greatness

about him. The philosopher calls this invisible of which the visible is an emanation, the Unknowable. The saint calls it the Divine. As substance is to all visible forms, even so is the Divine Unknowable to the substance of thought and form. What is physiologically the Unknowable is æsthetically the Infinitely Perfect; psychologically, it is the Bottom-structure of Personality, the Spirit. The gods might be false, thought Noren, but not God. And God, to his mind, meant an Eternal. Being, Whose Consciousness is limitless in inwardness, Who is the Substance of Consciousness without any of the conformations or modifications which make up the phenomenon of personality, and Who is beyond the limitations of thought and form. To Noren, the idea of such a state of existence, the desire of the spiritually-educated soul to attain to such a consciousness,—was, in itself, proof that the ages had not lied in the religious experience and philosophy. The utmost aspiration of the human soul, when realised, is God.

The intellectual method by which Noren came to this position was largely unconscious. The religious instinct, though latent while the tempest of thought raged, reasserted itself as a stimulus to the intellectual consciousness when the mind could proceed no further than the bounds of the agnostic affirmation, "I do not know." At first this deification of life was vague and faint. When it first arose in his mind, the agnostic spirit in him turned away from it as from an intellectual error, but it persisted in asserting itself. Little by little it pressed in upon consciousness. And then Noren sought for arguments to support it; and the latent consciousness of truth in him was stirring, and a breath of a deeper life was wafted over the slumbering monastic consciousness in him, the consciousness which was to make itself known as the Swami Vivekananda; and it stirred almost into awakening. He thought that the perfection of personality could not be the by-product of mere physical purposes and processes in nature. True, the aim of character and life might be the transcendence of the soul over the inherent purposes for which life is. True, life itself might have before

it, as a goal, a grand extinction of all its relative forms. But might not the moment of extinction also be the finding of a state of changelessness, an emancipation of the soul from all the forms and bondages of the senses and the mind, whose nature is change? But such an extinction would certainly be the point where expansion was no longer possible, where time should have merged in eternity. The state of becoming, which is the condition of all personality, however advanced, might have as its goal, the realisation of the state of Pure Being. Then progress itself would have been merged in perfection; then the conditions of relative bondage and freedom of will would have been transcended by a condition of being without any relations. There, will would no longer be, for personality, which is only a semblance of true Individuality, would have found that Individuality. Will is only a function, a phenomenon of personality. But when Individuality has been reached, all will and all personality will have vanished, and only Truth and Reality stand out. Sensation has died out, and only Beatitude remains; pleasure and pain will have faded out, and Peace remains.

In this manner Noren scaled the mountain of argument in his thought until he reached a summit where he believed in God, though as yet he had not seen Him, as the Sum-total of personality; and he believed in Creation as an approach to that state of complete destruction which, in its turn, involved the truth that the purposes of Creation had been fulfilled. Creation, after all, is only a process, a means to an end, even as life itself; and the end may be the death even of life itself in the revelation of a Changeless Existence and a Supreme Reality.

But it must always be remembered that there were other factors equally important in Noren's finding of this intellectual, or rather spiritual, position besides his own innate power of discrimination and thought. There was, particularly, his spiritual master and the life which his master revealed to him through a perfected spiritual consciousness and character. One is now concerned only with the purely

intellectual manner in which Noren attained to such an elevated outlook. He was now convinced. And he began to build, though slowly at first, the fabric of an enlightened religious life upon this broad basis of insight and definition. It was a long way, however, between the state of agnosticism and the state of prayer. But prayer and contemplation were gradually awakened in Noren, for he had commenced to lead that life which was renunciation of the world and freedom from the net-work of desires and also, the quieting of the senses. He began to centre the strength and intensity of his thought upon these model ideals. And was not such concentration of thought, in itself, prayer?

Is not thought real? And is not that to which thought points, that which thought serves, more real? Aye, the vision of eternity is real because Man has seen it through the lens of thought, even within the boundaries of time. Aye, God is real, because of the constant stream in man both of thought and desire, that runs like a great flood, beyond its ordinary limits into the boundless ocean of eternity, pressing on to an ever higher and more spiritual realisation of life. When the thought of eternity becomes the feeling of eternity, then time is extinguished, and the soul goes beyond all personality into the Individuality of God-Consciousness. Noren knew this; he thought of it; aye, he desired it. And because of this, he found that his own very consciousness was a link in the chain that stretched from time into eternity, from becoming and progress into the state of perfection, and from bondage and qualified freedom into the boundless freedom of an Eternal Existence. "In the expansion of this conscious self" said Noren in the solitude he was wont to seek, "God is to be attained. When personality becomes transfigured, then God is. Selfish, imperfect personality, personality full of the fever of desire and the ague of sorrow, of misery, and of unhappiness because of the failure of attaining desire,—such personality must be extinguished." For this reason, Noren believed that the highest truth intellectually perceived must become the perfect

character in the manifestation. Character is the test of vision. Or, regarded from another point, Noren thought that in the very expansion of desire could God be attained. "The soul must desire eternal realities ; it must seek truth with the same avidity and passionate desire with which it now longs for the life and pleasures of the senses and for the possession of the objects of the senses." At first consciousness deals with the senses ; then it rises to higher levels and deals with the world of thought and clearer vision. And then—and then—is there no Beyond ? The mystics, the saints aver, "There Is." Their insight is the proof. The mystical consciousness is the test.

And there came a longing over the soul of Noren for the mystical consciousness. There came a longing to make thought a process of feeling. The *idea*, God, must become the *feeling* that God is. And when one has that *feeling*, that glorified consciousness, who shall say unto him, "This is true, and this is not true" ? Beyond the dual shadows of thought he has gone into certitude and into peace. Intellectual truth is always debatable ; spiritual truth is beyond.

To feel such a longing, even to dream of such an exalted state of consciousness, verily, in itself, is spirituality ; it is beatitude. It is the dream that will be the awakened reality, when thought becomes feeling in the spiritual transfiguration. It is the desire that must be born into realisation. But these things are of the solitude and of one's own innermostness. For this reason did Noren deeply ponder and ponder over thoughts regarding God. He would dream day after day as to the contents of the Infinite Consciousness. The act of meditation had become a habit with him. The desire to solve, to see, to know the truth, became a torrent of intensity, and already one sees how the walls of his intellectual mind were being undermined and washed away, and how the intuitive mind, the direct servant of the soul, was being thrown open to the effulgence of the purified consciousness and that immediate revelation which is the Word of God. At night he often sank the shaft of personality into its very

depths. In the dream consciousness he would see dimly, things which were beyond all mortal dreaming or, in the morning he would awaken with a feeling of exaltation that could only be explained on the ground that sleep was not sleep, not, at least, that which one might imagine. Particularly is this true in the case of those who are extraordinarily enlightened. Does not the scientist, here and there, find the solution, in the dream, that the conscious mind tried to discover, but could not! And of the spiritual mind, what transition of longing into vision may transpire in that mystic consciousness into which sleep ushers each and every human soul.

Noren's mind was a constant stream of thought, and the constant thinking made an avenue for the mind to pass to higher things, in the state of dreams. One who has ever been aware of the intensity of thought, glimpses somewhat of the state into which the mind of Noren was now living and aspiring. Only he upon whom discovery has dawned, or truth has flashed suddenly, can gather the idea of Noren's personal experience. Feelings of exaltation, temporary glimpses of the reality, moments in which the intellectual certitude became a moral certitude and more, all these were daily with Noren. It was at this time, also, that his body would frequently seem to him as a thing apart. When feeling covers the entire extent of thought, then thought which is otherwise insensate and unconvincing, which, as the sages hold, is otherwise material, becomes alive by responding to the spiritual vibration. It becomes a power. The spirit has entered into the mind, and thought and feeling, thought and vision become indistinguishably one and the same in nature and in the process of manifestation. Noren had this experience constantly. His mind was of that type which soared readily into the highest sphere of thinking. His thought would be coloured by the warmth of his feeling and by the desire for reality and truth. Thus to him the forming of thought, the entertaining of ideas was, likewise, the spelling of the names and definitions of reality.

It was at this time that he eagerly desired that some one should be his constant companion, who could understand his tendencies of temperament and understand, also, what he understood. He desired companionship in the intensity and in the novelty of his living in his new world. To him it was an intellectual revelation brought about by the reading of the life of the Soul. He had stumbled on the well-springs of inspiration, and come across the source of all scriptural truth. He lingered for days in this consciousness. He looked inspired. His family, above all, his mother, saw and wondered. The agnostic had become transfigured, and upon his countenance shone the light of revelation. They wondered, but he said little of what he felt. But there were those amongst his companions who were intimate with him. They respected his attitude of mind and heart. They looked upon him with that same regard as one has for an aspiring personality on its way to saintship. And in the Puja-hall of his home, where once he played at being a king, he now became a tutor in things spiritual to the playmates of a younger day. At this time the spirit of what might be called an excessive Puritanism descended upon him, and he often walked in a world where all was goodness and where the harsh sounds of sense were not heard. He was as a young priest to his companions. And they, too, breathed with him a new life and a new inspiration. They were in a world of thought and feeling of such spiritual intensity that upon some of them moments fell when they lost sight of their surroundings, so rapt were they in close attention to the words that fell from the lips of Noren. He himself felt freedom, infinite freedom from the tempest of thought he had passed through. He felt peace within and knew himself as a child of the Most High, a child of Reality. Within him, he thought, dwelt that same Reality which men call God. The Reality dwells in every soul, but some are more conscious than others of its sublime existence. He who has realised fully, is verily the Lord Himself, the Supreme Reality Embodied.

Luminous and more luminous thoughts crowded upon the

surface consciousness of Noren,—wonderful sparks of the Divine Fire which slumbered in the abyss of his real nature. He carried himself in these days with a regal air. He would talk to the group of lads who were his friends and college-mates, and it would be for hours that the discourse continued. The inspiration of the speaker would often break forth into song and the enthusiasm of his listeners would swell higher and higher until they were transported with joy.

Their leader, however, was struggling for deeper verities. Still that special companion, that bosom-affinity of soul for whose coming he had hoped and prayed had not come; but, if he had only known, that a short distance from his own home, lived one on the banks of the Ganges, who was crying for his spiritual children to come, and particularly for one who proved to be Noren, to be his spiritual mate! Noren determined that he must *see* God. For this reason he decided that he must know one who had himself seen God and thus be helped by him. Of himself, he did not feel the great divine power by which vision would come to him. But he must know the spirit of things. He must go beyond the groping mind. He must become invincibly certain. The conviction which was his, born of intense thought upon the Spirit, must now be translated, literally, into the *consciousness* of the Imperishable. Then, alone, bliss would dawn, everlastingly. The dream of searching would be broken in the glorious finding. He longed for a taste of the nectar of immortality, by which he might be translated into the Beyond. The "Unknowable" of his philosophical studies had become something actual to him, and all knowledge of man seemed only so much graduated ignorance. So had the sages of the ancient Judæic world found, and they had said of man's knowledge, "Lo! It is foolishness with God!"

Such was the making of the man one now beholds. For him even the great awakening was coming to pass. It may be that the intellect of Noren will be spoken of as brilliant. It may be that some will say of his heart, "It is wonderful." But this is of the man. Now it was to be the revelation of

the Soul. Noren's life flowed as the ebb of the tide from the river of personality into the ocean of spiritual life. All his queries were now spiritual queries. He was yearning after exalted states of being. He was aware of timeless truth. He felt the surge of an infinite joyousness, because all his doubts were being solved. He was approaching that intense period of which the Upanishads say, "Then all the desires of the heart are broken; all doubts vanish; that which is mortal fades, and that which is immortal shines forth".

Yet Noren was not altogether what he was to be. He knew only one longing—the longing to see God. This grew with him until it became fierce with meaning. He demanded from life a companion, aye, more than a companion, a guide to his thought, aye, even more than an ordinary guide. He desired the companionship of one who had actually and really seen God. Henceforth one sees him in search of that companion in soul. Henceforth he wandered from door to door of those whom the world reckoned, at that time, as the spiritually great. He wandered long. He wandered to many. At last he found that which he sought, and that which he sought when found, became ever afterwards the ideal of his life, the other part of his self. At last Noren met this guide, this teacher, this companion, but strange to say, his mind paused, his intellect doubted,—but only for a time. Later he came to realise, and then his joy was overwhelming. He had found him; but at first there was some difficulty in recognising the Saint. Because of this, however, the joy and the assurance when they came were all the greater, all the surer, all the more intense.

And he, who for Noren had become the incarnation of all his longing to see and realise God, is known, through the fame and the eloquence and spirituality of the Swami Vivekananda, as the ideal man, the blending of the human and the divine. This was Sri Ramakrishna Deva, the Master of Noren, the Servant of Mankind, *one who had seen God!*

XXVIII

THE BRAHMO SAMAJ.

To understand the process of progressive development of Noren's personality, it becomes necessary to survey the nature and purpose of a great movement which had already originated and which was causing considerable attention at this time,—the Brahmo Samaj.

When an age awakens to a new period in its historical unfolding, there are always movements of reform, making themselves manifest as the struggle between a new vision which seeks expression, and the old established vision which desires self-conservation. From out these two differing visions the reformers and reactionaries arise. The involved misunderstanding deepens. Fanaticism is born in both directions; but behind both phases of fanaticism is the common effort at purity of ideal vision and purity of ideal expression. Had this been constantly and consistently taken into consideration, how much bitterness between man and man would have been averted during the course of the ages! Both parties are labouring for truth, for reality, for what is best. If they perceived this, undoubtedly they would unite; and the ideal would the sooner be made manifest. Ever present in every age and with all mankind is, whether consciously or unconsciously, the purity of motive and the purity of effort in the rendering of ideals into social forms. This fact should be recognised by the student of human experience, particularly in the study of all movements of reform. In a nation's life, as in the life of each and every individual soul, a new and helpful vision is bound to come. For the time being there may be serious differences, or even a violent clash, between the two outlooks, but the end is sure illumination, if the search be sincere and if its object be truth. And is it not true that, but for the upgrowth, from time to time, of certain thoroughly self-adjusting powers

within the national life, the very ensemble and general character of the structure of its culture would be undermined by the incoming of radical and totally destructive elements of a foreign nature? Better to have differences within the national consciousness than that any foreign superimposition of thought and culture should transpire! And in all things, the end and aim in the evolutionary transformation, which reform movements may bring about, should always be and generally is the preservation of the spirit of national culture. The form of the culture, perchance, may suffer for the time, but still it benefits by the purification; and, when all facts are taken into consideration, purification from within is assuredly more desirable than disruption from without.

Bearing these thoughts in mind, the observer of the progress of Hinduism, from a Hindu point of view, in the nineteenth century, sees foremost, amongst other forces, the rise and consolidation of the institution known as the Brahmo Samaj. Its coming into existence was contemporaneous with the awakening of the intellect and heart of that well-known reformer, Raja Ram Mohun Roy. Its leaders in later days were the Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore and Keshub Chandra Sen. These men are known throughout the West as amongst the greatest of Hindus. And their learning has astonished the West, even as it has aroused the potentialities of Hinduism. When Christianity and a foreign culture with their educational methods were becoming extremely widespread, and the danger of a national conversion to the orthodox learning and moral and social standards and religions of the West threatened the very existence of Hinduism, these men arose, as great moral forces, stemming the foreign tide of inundation by reviving the old Hindu monotheistic conception, modified somewhat by Western theological ideas, as the basis of a national religion, otherwise retaining the main constituents of the national Scriptures, those philosophical and spiritual treatises known as the Upanishads. After all, however influenced the movement might have been in other ways by Western social and moral standards, as it un-

questionably was in its religious character, it was fundamentally Aryan ; essentially it was Hindu. The Brahmo Samaj was an attempt, and a very successful attempt, as the Swami Vivekananda used to say, at preserving Hinduism, at the cost of many of its social forms. This might not have been a conscious intention with the originators of the Samaj ; but it was an inevitable result. As matters now stand, after the passing of several decades of years, Brahmoism is coming to be counted by many of its adherents as a sect of Hinduism. And now both Brahmoism and the spirit within Modern Hinduism are stemming the tide of foreign religious ideas and the further invasion and successful propaganda of the Christian missionaries.

Heretofore, the difficulty has been that orthodox Hinduism could not understand the uses of the new organisation. It was excusable. There must always be the spirit of an intense conservatism. On the other hand, the Brahmoistic movement was not definitely conscious of its own ideals in relation to the unforeseen and detrimental changes it might bring about in the Hindu society. These were foreseen by the orthodox Hindus, and therefore the Samaj seemed violently radical and was accused of a fanatical spirit. But the truth becomes evident from a close and comparative study of other historic instances.

The Brahmo Samaj was to orthodox Hinduism what Protestantism was, as a theological difference, to Roman Catholicism, in the middle of the sixteenth century. It was a protestant movement throughout. Amongst other things it protested against certain forms, social as well as religious, which had crept into Hinduism in the course of time, as foreign pressure was brought to bear upon it by the incoming of many strange and Non-Aryan peoples, who became absorbed into its body. In the process of absorption, foreign elements of creed and myth and custom were sure to have been assimilated. But the Brahmo community had only a vague idea at that time that those elements against which it rebelled were foreign elements. This knowledge came only recently as a

result of the research of Indian historians and archæologists. But since the time of this historic discovery the character of the attitude on the part of Hindus to Brahmos and of Brahmos to Hindus has varied considerably. It appears now that both Hindus and Brahmos are working for the self-same end which is the restoration of Maha Bharata, or Heroic India. Both parties desire the purification and resurrection of the national spirit. Both Hindus and Brahmos are working for the advent of a great national life. The Brahmo Samaj now understands and emphasizes the idea of maintaining the national individuality at any cost, though its attitude is still largely Western in character and spirit. The Hindu, bent on preserving the integrity of the national consciousness, is now willing to accept whatever is worthy of acceptance in the foreign culture of the West, adapting it, however, to suit the exigencies of the Hindu temperament and spirit.

But to return to the comparison. The Protestant movement in Europe, though seemingly only religious in intent, inevitably brought on much social havoc and reform in the course of its development and influence. It was, also, however, the Modern Spirit growing incarnate in the progress of its becoming ; it was the spirit of broader ideas and of deeper learning. The Protestant movement introduced the spirit of liberalism into the West. It was similar in the instance of the Brahmo Samaj. In its religious aspect, the Brahmo Samaj greatly resembles the Theistic and the Unitarian movements, with which the Western reader is familiar. It is monotheistic, thereby disbelieving in many important tenets of faith of the orthodox Hindu religion, such as the Divine Incarnation, the need of the Guru. Most of all, it protests against the belief in a multiplicity of divine forms and, consequently, against polytheistic and image worship. It can be readily understood how contact with the religion of the dominant power greatly affected the theories of the Brahmo leaders. That they could have in the least retained a Hindu spirit and have made the texts of the Upanishads, which are the core of Hinduism, their scriptures, is the wonder. The movement grew amongst that

section of the Hindus who had been educated in the Western method and who were favourable to a general awakening of the Hindu masses. Naturally, some chose the new path of belief as their own so as to be identified as nearly as possible with the religious creed of the foreign power, and so that social privilege and freedom would be sure to result thereby. But the majority were persons intent on the visualisation of a great ideal. Hinduism, however, is not inimical to radically new religious beliefs. In the past there were many previous movements quite as sweeping in their religious character. Hinduism is all-tolerant in religion, giving the widest freedom to conscience and intellect.

The social changes which were proposed by the Brahmo Samaj were numerous and sweeping. It was due to these that the difficulty arose. It was these which aroused the self-defence of Hinduism. Hinduism welcomes all religions. It tolerates anything save insincerity. India is the land where religious persecution is historically unknown. Even the Chârvâkas, the Materialists, preached unharmed upon the temple steps and vehemently abused religion and the priesthood. But socially, Hinduism is bound and stratified. Now, however, there is a change, and a suppleness for readjustment with a renewed vigour has come into existence since the days of the Swami Vivekananda, within Hinduism itself.

The Brahmoistic movement demanded social reform. Among its demands were the breaking-up of the caste system and consciousness, and the introduction of the doctrine of the social equality of man. Then there were the demands that Hindu womanhood should be educated and emancipated, that the marriageable age should be raised for the girl and that she should have full freedom in the choice of a husband; the latter clause, also, affected young men. These demands naturally involved the radical modification of orthodox society, could they have been fulfilled.

The West has achieved social emancipation. Its masses have been raised and individualism has been developed to an enormous extent. With individualism came, likewise,

increased facilities for its development and ampler expression. But in religion the West has been bound and stratified, even as India is bound to-day, sociologically speaking. Now the West and the East are seeing things in a different light because of the working power of a new spirit. The West is growing liberal in a religious sense, and India is remodelling its society taking a new view of its social problems. In both instances, one observes, in East and West, the spirit of humanity struggling for and realising various aspects of the idea of freedom. Ultimately, of course, freedom is personal, being neither social, nor religious, nor industrial, nor political. It is ultimately psychological, involving freedom from all limitations and limited desires, in which sense it is purely spiritual.

It would have been very strange had Noren not been deeply and seriously affected by the Brahmoistic movement. As it was, it aroused a tumult of thought and feeling within him. He was a constant attendant at the addresses and sermons of the Brahmo leaders. He had familiarised himself with the writings and the spirit of Raja Ram Mohun Roy. Keshub Chandra Sen was the idol of Calcutta at the time, particularly of the younger generation. He was the orator of the day. His following was immense. Secretly Noren hoped that such strength of thought, such depth of feeling, such spirited enthusiasm, such personal magnetism would some day be his. He frankly admired the leader. Later in his career Noren became, like Keshub, the arch-orator of India, the spiritual genius of his time, the magnetic and the impassioned teacher, the teacher of a new order; but there was this distinction, however, that with Noren the introspection was deeper, and the new order, whose message he voiced, was a fulfilment, and not a denial of the old Hindu consciousness and culture.

Noren was imbued with the same thoughts as concerned the Brahmo thinkers. He felt the burden and the paralysing effect of the rigidity of caste. He felt that the womanhood of his nation must be freed, must be educated; and in his

home circle he became the ardent champion of the new order. His mother listened quietly and patiently, and having a great faith in her son's sincerity and longing for truth, believed that he would, in time and after much reflection, surely see all things in their true perspective. Noren was the apostle of the new order. He joined the movement. His name was registered in the books of membership. When he became the Swami Vivekananda his name still stood on the list although he had then assumed the championship of a loftier ideal, which was to be in the end a reform broader and not less radical than that which the Brahmo Samaj contemplated and was then endeavouring to introduce. But he then differed seriously with them, as to the means and methods of reform. Reform, he held in later life, must come from within through an awakened public intelligence. There should be no denunciation of traditional beliefs and customs, as was customary with the Brahmo Samaj in its methods of reform. The process should be a building-up with the materials which were at hand to the best possible advantage. The horizon must not be foreign, nor yet antagonistic to the view of those for whom reform is proposed; it must be a national, a Hindu point of view; it must not be Western. Conservative methods must be used to bring about radical reform. Assimilation, he always held, was just, but imitation, never. And many Brahmos to-day are inclining to this same mind, because of the spirit and progress of that nationalism which he preached and which has since descended as an aspiration upon the people, urging them into the spirit of unity, self-sacrifice, organisation and work in the name of an enlightened and broadened Hinduism, a Hinduism including all sects and denominations and castes and creeds and races.

Noren thought deeply at this time. His thought paused upon the Indian Problem. It busied itself with the reconstruction of the national consciousness within the bounds and the spirit of a liberal Hinduism. Even now he was imbued with the necessity of conservation in dealing with reform.

Reform he desired, but not at the expense or by the wholesale destruction of the Hinduism which was the civilisation of his forefathers. He was, of course, not as clear at this time as he was in later life, of the needs and methods of reform. But he was constantly and earnestly labouring in his mind concerning these things.

It must always be held in mind, however, that there were three elements in the make-up of Noren's personality and outlook, as a Hindu genius,—first of all, his discipleship to his spiritual master, secondly, his own power of observation and insight, thirdly, his own personal realisation. But, as it is so exceedingly difficult to speak of these elements in that contemporaneous relation in which they existed, it is best to speak of the second element first, because insight he had by his own personal genius. But the other two elements were most conspicuous at a later time, when he had really accepted his spiritual guide as such, and when he had travelled the length and breadth of his own land and had studied the customs and culture of other nations during his sojourn in the West. His was always a growing mind ; he had fixed opinions, in a relative sense only, because he was ready at any moment to throw overboard any theory in place of which he had discovered a higher aspect of reality and truth. Then, too, these three elements, spoken of as composing his personality, were constantly in development. His insight was a growing faculty ; his realisation was always new ; his understanding of his Master ever becoming deeper and deeper. They were contemporaneous throughout, exchanging and interchanging, one influencing the other, and all, conjointly, making for the complete transformation through which he was continually passing from year to year and from one period to another in his life. Already he had met his Master, though now the influence exerted over him by his *guru* was indistinct ; already his insight was greatly developed, and his advanced thoughts and experiences far exceeded those of the young men of his own age.

His vision even in this period and since he had joined

the Brahmo movement was that of *Heroic India*; he had the vision of *Maha Bharata*, of the glorious days of the epics when life was new and free, and woman the social equal of man, and men were sages and free as kings, and when the Aryan civilisation was not yet tainted with elements of foreign admixture. He saw that old India and desired a similar India for the future—ever glorious, elastic in form, individual in spirit, supported by the growing of the inward, national genius and free of all stiltedness and burdens of forms from which the spirit had departed. At this time, he believed in an India and in a Hinduism which should be faithful to the genius and the great visions of the past, transforming all contact with modern life and Western influence into the individuality of a personified Self of Race, adding unto the historic consciousness of the past the spirit of the modern world, without however incurring that contamination and loss of national self-respect which comes of an ape-like imitation, an imitation which ends, ultimately, in the death of the racial and national life.

During these days he had joined a movement of the young men of Bengal who desired the unity and education of the great Indian masses, irrespective of caste, or race, or creed. His vision of reform was an inner, spiritual one. At least, it was such in the making, for eventually he came to understand the solution of the people's problems through an ennobling and ampler vision of its inherent greatness, which was the possession of the highest spiritual consciousness the world could perceive. In understanding wherein lies its superiority over the other nations, would India rise to a renewal of her ancient greatness. As a member of the Brahmo Samaj, Noren was a flame of eloquence to his equals, storming with the desire to rectify the disorders and the degradation he believed to have come into the structure of Hinduism. But he never totally renounced Hinduism, in his heart. He was always the Hindu, but in a liberal way, a Hindu in the emancipated definition of the idea. He believed, together with those of advanced ideas, that real reform should mean

progress, and not idle imitation carrying extinction in its wake. In all his zeal at eradicating social evils, he never wavered from his conception of and devotion to the cause of Hinduism. Some members of the new movement, in fact, it may be said, most of them, felt a great gulf of distinction between themselves and the orthodox Hindus. They looked askance at the culture and the past of their own historic ancestry ; and amongst them were those who denounced Hinduism, as not even the Christian missionaries or the foreign embittered critics, with all their prejudiced will and conscious blindness, have ever been able to do. But still a difference must be made between the former and the latter. The former were actuated by a deep-founded sincerity, a true spirit of disinterested love for the land and a genuine intention of service to the depressed and the outcast, and of introducing what they understood to be much-needed reforms. As to the spirit of the latter, however, the less said the better. They were differently actuated. Noren had learnt to respect and revere the culture, the wisdom and the glory of the Aryan ancestors, and this kept him from becoming a destructive radical with limited views and denouncing methods. There was also with him at all times the personal capacity for the largest vision and the synthetic perception.

Much had gone into the formation of the present consciousness of Noren through his own personal efforts. The elements thereof were his personal education, his searching observations of life, and his innate sense of the necessity of all reform that made for freedom from obsolete methods, and the opportunities of a fuller national self-awareness and self-expression. Added to all this were his philosophical instincts, and, above all, his religious feeling and spiritual aspiration. He was eager ; he was sincere ; he was honest in his own perception of ideas, and honest and unprejudiced in endeavouring to know the views of others. He was looking for truth ; he was willing to transcend anything he might have accepted for a larger vision, whether in the

domain of æsthetics, or sociology, or even theology. The elements of his character were many, and becoming safely and perpetually established. He was true ; he was deep. Above all he loved greatness of heart ; and he despised meanness as the first sin in the catalogue of unrighteous doings. It was this peculiar and remarkable make-up of personality which led him, at last, into the newer consciousness of what he thenceforth called "Enlightened Hinduism" as compared with the definition and purposes of the Brahmo Samaj, which seemed too radical to him in the later period of his life. But to-day, the unifying spirit is at work within the Brahmo Samaj, and this distinction is slowly dwindling away. One may reasonably hope and pray that both the Brahmos and the enlightened Hindus in their sincere longing for a greater To-Morrow, will ultimately combine in throwing off all the warring differences in name and method, and threading through the mazes of the present come into the rich fulfilment of the future with an accomplished realisation as to the full meaning and the full potentialities of the One Imperishable Spirit of Hinduism, whether past, present or future.

Such a spirit has already descended, and the enlightened Brahmo styles himself in pride "A Hindu," and the enlightened orthodox Hindu feels with Swami Vivekananda the uses and the unison of all the pulsations of the Mother-Heart. He feels and reveals also that spirit which the Swami Vivekananda showed when asked, "Sire, do you denounce the Brahmos?" by replying decisively, "By no means!" Brahmoism had become to him as a high caste in Hinduism. The idea of sect had died out in him for that of a higher vision,—the vision of a religiously-redeemed and socially-redeemed Hinduism,—a Hinduism unified, eclectic and glorious, including all, denying, denouncing none. But this was because he had sat at the Feet of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the man of Supreme Realisation.

XXIX

"MAHASHAYA, HAVE YOU SEEN GOD?"

The struggle must end in victory when the heart is sincere. Noren thought he had found peace in the circle of the Brahmo Samaj. He had dreams of becoming a great preacher like Keshub Chandra Sen. He thought he had found a suitable theology consistent with philosophical truth. He had joined the choir of the Samaj and gave forth all the religious enthusiasm he had in song. He was a man now. He gradually made the acquaintance of the intellectual leaders of the society. He saw that they were men of unimpeachable character. He believed in them implicitly. He loved and admired them. For a time he was deeply satisfied. Then it dawned upon him that he had not as yet *seen* God. He felt the surge of the divine light whenever he sang, whenever he lifted up his heart in prayer, whenever he listened to the eloquence of the ministers of the Samaj; but if God is real, thought Noren, then He must be *realised*. Religion carries with it much tranquillity and much exaltation of the mind and senses, but one must know the pain of the yearning after God before he actually enters into the Divine Consciousness. There are, as it were, three periods in the mystical consciousness, first, that of exalted enthusiasm, second, that of "dryness" and spiritual uncertainty, and last, that of realisation. Noren experienced these three states. He felt the flow of a great enthusiasm; then he passed through the stage of a seeming farness from the ideal; finally, he came into the safe haven of positive realisation and the true seeing of God through the intense longing for God-vision.

Earnestly did Noren pray for enlightenment. Earnestly he struggled to live that life of righteousness which he knew was pleasing to the Most High. But sadness stole over his

days. He had not become conscious of God. In his longing to know the truth he made his way to the Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore, regarded by many of that time as among the most prominent of spiritual teachers. Though a man of enormous wealth, he had taken to the religious life in his search for peace and truth. He lived retired from the world in a retreat where he gave himself up to meditation and the study of spiritual truth. It was this man who drew out the powers of and gave an inspiration to Keshub Chandra Sen. To him Noren, likewise, came. The Maharshi told him to practise meditation with great intensity. A class was formed with the Maharshi as the preceptor, in which the members meditated for a given period and then spoke, one to the other, of those experiences each had in the course of his concentration of the mind upon God.

Noren's experience was of the nature of light. He saw a point of light revolving and finally becoming steadied and fixed. It appeared between the eye-brows where, according to the doctrines of the Scriptures, the eye of the mind, the spiritual sight, is located. This is that sight of which the Scriptures say, "It comprehends all things." From the point of light which Noren saw, various colours issued forth in splendour. Then his consciousness would expand as if to encompass fields of attention unknown to the normal functioning of the mind. It seemed as if it desired to expand beyond the awareness of the usual impressions of sense and embrace areas of vision and feeling unknown to the ordinary man. At this point, however, his meditation would break. Its contents would be dispersed. The effulgence of light vanished and Noren would find himself in his normal state of attention. These are exalted states of power, often to be felt in meditation, a power, passive yet almighty; when realised fully it goes to the further and more perfect unfolding of consciousness.

The Maharshi recognised in Noren a genius in the spiritual sense. He encouraged him. He helped him as much as he could. He spoke of him as an extraordinary young

man of remarkable potentialities. Noren continued his visits to the Maharshi until the time was ripe when he would really know a teacher, one who would develop and perfect in him the awakening of the spiritual self, until it burst into the radiance of the spiritual consciousness and into the Light of God.

It was the Sabbath day for the Brahmo Samaj when its members became aware, for the first time, of him who was to draw Noren from their circle. The Samaj counted in its following many persons of wealth and high social position. Some of these were present on the occasion. The choir had just finished with the song that reads in the first line, "I have made Thee the pole-star of my life." In the rear of the hall stood the figure of one, with only a garment about his loins for clothing. Pain was on his countenance; and he seemed to be conscious only of one thought. This thought expressed itself, suddenly in an exclamation, "Noren! Noren!" he cried. The gathering was astounded. Who was this man? Noren heard the call. His voice had just died out as the final note above the gathering of singers. He turned from the choir-place. He hastened down the aisle. It was Sri Ramakrishna! It was Sri Ramakrishna! On seeing Noren the face of the old man became radiant with joy. "My boy! My boy!" he exclaimed, "Why have you not come to see me? I have been waiting in anguish for your coming." The choir had begun to sing another song. It was wonderful in the text, speaking rapturously of the glory of the Lord. Sri Ramakrishna, on hearing it, lost all consciousness of his body, which stood rigid in ecstasy. His eyes, fixed intently on something known to himself alone, were aflame with the spiritual light that shone from them. When he returned to consciousness he was murmuring the Name of the Lord. Seeing Noren, he said to him with infinite tenderness, "Come, my boy, come! I have been longing to see you." Noren left the meeting. He felt bewildered at the great stir and attention which had been caused by this incident. "Who is this old man, anyway?" he thought to him-

self. He had met him a month or two ago, and ever since Sri Ramakrishna had desired the presence of Noren with an intensity akin to that with which he spoke of God. But Noren asked himself, "Why has he come into the Samaj and caused such a disturbance ! Everybody will take him for a madman." Noren did not understand Sri Ramakrishna. At times he thought of him as a brain-sick old man. At other moments he wondered at his spiritual intensity, at his surprising sincerity, and at the spiritual consciousness he undoubtedly seemed to possess.

Some short time before this, Noren had gone to the Ganges side where the house-boat of the Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore was anchored. He was burning with the desire to *see* God. "Is God real ? If so, I must, I must *see* Him !" The thought had burned into his brain like fire. He was almost feverish in the excitement with which he hastened to the river. He went in great haste up the steps that led to the Maharshi's private quarters. He opened the door. The Maharshi was seated on the floor in meditation posture in deep contemplation on God. The sudden entrance of Noren brought him with a start from his state of absorption. Before he could collect himself, Noren had burst out excitedly with a question that stunned the startled Maharshi. Noren's face was tense with meaning. His lips were parted ; his eyes were like coals of fire. The question rang out with a strange tenseness in the ring, "Mahashaya ! Have you *seen* God ?" The words were most emphatic in the utterance. The soul of the Maharshi was thrown back upon itself, as it were, like unto the ocean which is churned by the momentum of the waves in the time of tempest. He attempted to answer. He attempted twice ; he attempted a third time ; but each time he could not. Words failed him. Then, gazing deeply into Noren's eyes, as a man looks into the very abyss of his own soul, he said, "Boy, you have the Yogi's eyes !" A Yogi is one who has seen God, or else is in such an intensity of search that the very Presence of God is seen in the fire of his eyes.

Only a few days after this experience, Noren became almost mad with painful longing. No, the Maharshi, at least for Noren, had not *seen* God. He had not said so. Where should he find God then? He knew that all the philosophies of the world were trash. What were they but an attempt to describe the Indescribable One. He despised learning in that hour, and taking all the religious books that he had with him in his room he threw them aside. No, God could not be found in a book; no, not even in a holy book! Where then? O yes, there was Sri Ramakrishna. He would go to him. He would ask him that same question he had asked of the pious Maharshi. But what if he should be disappointed again! What if he received no answer, no definite answer! Yet, he must go. He left his room and his home. His mother asked him whither he was bound. He said, "To Sri Ramakrishna!" Bhuvaneswari Mata looked thoughtful. He had spoken of this man to her, not altogether without doubt, however. Ideas alarming in their nature went through her mind. Suppose this man should win over her son to the monastic life. No, that must not be! She would stand firmly against that. But unconsciously she was compelled later on to make the sacrifice.

Noren hastened to Dakshineswar, the abiding-place of Sri Ramakrishna, situated some distance from Calcutta, on the Ganges side. The Master was seated alone. Noren approached him with divine joy and fear alternately written upon his countenance. He wanted to ask that question; what if he should receive no answer! Was there to be another disillusion! He could not bear the idea of it; therefore, conflicting emotions possessed him. But he was determined. He saluted the Master; then at once he uttered those same words which he had spoken with all the fire of his soul to the venerable Maharshi. "Sire! Sire!" he said, "Have you *seen* God?" Sri Ramakrishna looked at him with spiritual ecstasy. Then, the wonder of it! The wonder of it! Immediately, unhesitatingly he replied, "Yes, my son! I have seen God! I do see Him just as I see you before me.

Only I see the Lord in a much more intense sense. And I can show Him to you !" What was this ! What was this ! Here was a man who had *seen* God ! The words rang deeply ; they lingered with a tremendous intensity ; then they died out in the region of Noren's own soul as faint whispers, whispers of imperishable truth and of undying reality. Noren was overcome with joy. O the bliss of it all ! The bliss of the unbounded assurance of knowing one who had *seen* God ! What blessedness ! What inexpressible blessedness ! For a moment Noren felt the torrent of all this ; it was too much for him ; he felt he was entering another sphere of consciousness. Months of anxious search, months of much mental anguish, and here was the healing of all his wounds. In this single moment the anxieties of hundreds of weary, weary hours were all removed. The thirst of Noren's soul for the waters of life was being quenched.

And yet—O the night of ignorance and the bondage of darkness ! All the joy left him of a sudden. Yes, he was to find God. But it must still be a struggle ; and a struggle at that, with this very God-intoxicated man. He was to doubt even Sri Ramakrishna. He was to challenge all the spiritual convictions of this prophet, until the time of struggle would suddenly pass into one mighty and divine state of realistic consciousness, and he would know the Highest Illumination, and in very fact see God. The struggle with his master, however, made the spiritual illumination he became possessed of all the more established, all the surer, all the more real.

So when Sri Ramakrishna came crying, as a child, into the Sabbath circle of the Brahmo Samaj, conscious only of his love for Noren and the Presence of the Lord, it was no wonder that Noren felt slightly abashed, being the centre of all eyes. Sri Ramakrishna had told him only several days before that he had *seen* God. Yet Noren was put to embarrassment at the appearance of the saint in so public a place and with such a disregard in his manner of dress for the stilted conventions of society. How strange is life !

And, yet verily, Sri Ramakrishna had *seen* God ; aye, he was a Man of God. Even so did Noren later come to know.

Again and again, Noren remained away from the saint. There was one day, however, after which Noren always continued to frequent the Gardens at Dakshineswar, where the Master lived. He had not been for some days to visit Sri Ramakrishna who constantly desired to see him. For this reason the Master had come to see his disciple at Calcutta. Noren was seated with that same group of boys with whom he was seen on the morning previous to the university examination. It was some days after that incident. The same boy who had previously endeavoured to turn Noren's thought from the monastic ideals and the monastic life, spoke again criticising Sri Ramakrishna. Noren bore it quietly. He himself did not yet understand ; but within his heart he had a deep love and a great faith, that faith which in time removes even mountains.

Just when the conversation reached the highest pitch, a voice called out, "Noren ! Noren !" All started to their feet. Whose voice was this ? Ah ! It was the voice of Sri Ramakrishna himself. Noren hastened down the stairs, leaving the group of lads astounded. They were standing, in rapt expectancy, silent, wondering. As Noren was descending, Sri Ramakrishna was ascending the stairs. His eyes were filled with tears of joy. "Noren, why have you not come to me these last days ?" he asked. He was as simple as a child. He had brought with him some sweetmeats with which he fed Noren with his own hands. Ah ! Indeed ! Wonderful is the way the Lord searches out the paths of illumination for the struggling and sincere devotee. The Lord Himself comes to one who searches ; the Teacher himself comes to the disciple when the latter is prepared.

"Come !" Sri Ramakrishna urged. "Sing me one of your songs." They had reached the room. All made profound salutation to him as it is customary in India to make to all holy men. Noren took his musical instrument, the *tanpura*. All took their seat upon the floor. He commenced singing

a song to the Divine Mother. The others sat still. A wonderful silence and peace prevailed. In a few moments Sri Ramakrishna was senseless to all outer things, having gone beyond himself to the Divine Mother, in the response of his soul to that song. At that moment the room became filled with a Presence. The friends of Noren felt as if they had entered a new world where all was bliss. Noren himself was at the feet of the Master. Slowly Sri Ramakrishna resumed the consciousness of sense. The room had become a temple. It was evening now; and from the near-by temples and dwelling-places arose the song of devotees amidst temple-gongs and incense to the Lord.



XXX

IDEALS IN HINDUISM.

In going deeper into the development and developing process of Noren's personality, and in order to understand that intimate relationship he had with Sri Ramakrishna in the way of discipleship, it is essentially necessary to be fully acquainted with the ideals in Hinduism. This is important in order to comprehend the mystical consciousness to which Hinduism is the stimulus. It is likewise necessary in order to understand the mystical temperament and experiences of Sri Ramakrishna, and of Noren in particular.

The Hindu religious consciousness resembles, so to say, the map of India which is studded with many divisions, inhabited by many diverse peoples of diverse tongues, and yet united by one territorial entirety. Even so the Hindu religious consciousness, divided as it is into numerous diversifications of idea and worship, is likewise eclectically related and united by the philosophy of the Vedanta, "the end of wisdom."

The conception of divinity held by the expounders of this philosophy is that of an Impersonal Existence, not the denial, but the utmost fulfilment of personality. It is a great positive life, whose nature is reality and truth, realising itself as boundless in its consciousness and inexpressibly free, transcending the qualifications of thought and form and the limitations which these necessarily involve. The divine nature is the great positive and unit reality, compared with which the pluralistic universe, though existent, is unreal, possessing only a phenomenal existence. The Subject of this limitless divine life is Paramatman or Brahman. The philosophers of the Vedanta, however, admit that a Personal God exists so long as the human mind perceives duality. But even He is subject to change, even as His work, made manifest in the

gradual evolution of the cosmos, is subject to change. He is real because Brahman is real. And Brahman is neither He nor She. Brahman can only be referred to as It. None of the predicates of relative existence, such as extent and duration, can be applied to Brahman. "It is beyond the Creative Aspects of Reality."

The great exhortation of the Vedanta is that each and every soul, in whatsoever sphere of the universe, shall rise above all mortality to the realisation of Brahman. That is to say, that the personal soul shall come to realise that It alone is Reality, the process being a gradual expansion of consciousness. All relative ideas and relationships about which consciousness builds itself in the weaving of desire must be transcended. The states of progress and becoming, which are the soul's constant experience, must attain their climax, culminating in Pure Being and Absolute Perfection. Then all ideas of birth and death will have ceased to be; time will have sunk into eternity; sensation will have forever passed into beatitude; all progress will have died out, for That to which progress tends will have been realised. Then all the fraud of personality will have vanished, with its relative freedom and bondage of will. For Infinite Freedom has then been attained, beyond all struggle, beyond all desire, beyond all bondage. When the personal soul realises the Self, then, verily, it is Brahman. "Tat Tvam Asi," meaning "Thou Art That," is the spirit of all Vedanta teaching, *That* being the *Om Tat Sat* or the state of immeasurable knowledge, eternal existence and unfathomable bliss.

The Hindu conceives of truth in the categories of the Real and the unreal. Thus something may exist, being however at the same time unreal in the highest understanding of reality. Whatever is relatively real or possesses aspects of reality is of the essence of Brahman. Man exists as personality. Higher than man are the Gods, the Devas, and other superior beings. The reality of all is Brahman. With this as the background, the mind immediately recognises the synthesis of Hinduism. Polytheism, Theism,

Monism, all are one in the vision of the Highest. The Gods are Personal Forms or aspects of Brahman and, because Brahman is real, even so are they real. They are *Idea-Forms* of Brahman. More real are they than man, relatively speaking, because they are more immediate forms and emanations of the Infinite Reality and more conscious of reality than men. The humblest Hindu peasant knows this.

According to the needs of time and place and according to the varying necessities of the human mind, these spiritual imagings of Brahman vary. Sometimes Brahman is conceived of as the Divine Father, or the Divine Mother, or as the Eternal One, wrapt in Meditation, or as the Terrible One, the Personification of Infinite Force, or as the Preserver, or the Destroyer, or the Creator, or as a Divine Incarnation. The Incarnation is the God-Man who realises and preaches the state or consciousness of Brahman; He is God born as Man. There are in Hinduism innumerable Gods, or visualisations of Brahman which the human mind has made unto itself, but underlying the apparent polytheism is a great monotheism, and ultimately a spiritual monism. In the end, as every Hindu knows, all these seemingly different Deities are one, first because they are manifestations of the One and Same Reality, and secondly because they represent the consciousness of Brahman in different aspects. So there is, ultimately, even only One Personal God. All the Gods are One Person in that they have the same Divine Consciousness and because all *are* Brahman. But there is still a higher purpose. The majority of men recognise the Personal God in their own particular objectification of Brahman. It may be Krishna, or Buddha, or Rama, or Chaitanya, even as with the Christians it is Jesus the Christ. There is no clash in religion in India, however varied the religious belief or worship. Instinctively every Hindu worships all the Gods, bowing to the Great Ideal of which each one is the separate embodiment. He sees the underlying oneness and unity of all the Gods, recognising Brahman in them all. It is a racial characteristic, a racial inheritance. The eclectic vision is peculiarly Hindu in the

understanding of religion. Thus every God in Hinduism represents aspects and symbols of the One Eternal Reality.

Therefore, in India, polytheism is the highest monism in the essence. The many forms of henotheism, or the deification of any one representation of Brahman as the Supreme Personal God, is also, as a consequence, monism in the essence. And monotheism itself becomes a spiritual monism, for eventually the individual soul finds that its own reality is the same as that of the God worshipped. Whom, then, to worship?—asks the Hindu. He says that the worshipper and the worshipped and the Ideal of worship, and all the Gods and all souls are *One*. It is because of this unifying and supreme outlook of the Vedanta that the devotee can sincerely worship all the Gods, or take any one God as his chosen Ideal, or worship the Impersonal Brahman within his own soul, with equal assurance that all religions and all religious philosophies lead to the self-same goal. Thus India, seemingly so diversified in religious belief, tradition and custom, is *one* in this great thought. Even a stone, the Hindu says, has the Divine Substance.

The final conclusion of the Vedanta is that all these Gods are visions and personifications, created by the soul itself, of Brahman. All stand for various torch-light ideas of the human mind. As man develops, his conceptions of the Gods grow. The Gods do not change. Brahman is ever the same. It is man who changes, it is man who grows. Finally the soul, in its most luminous insight, discovers that even as all great ideas are aspects of one all-including truth, even so are the Personal Gods manifestations of the same Divine Nature and Consciousness. All external forms of divinity are superimpositions by the inner divinity of the soul upon the special vision it entertains at any given time. Ultimately all superimpositions die out. Ultimately all the Gods merge in their true nature, the One and Indivisible. Only Brahman, only Reality remains. And the Gods are Brahman, and the soul is Brahman and truth is Brahman. Verily, the universe is Brahman. And

all paths, however diversified in the religious idea and worship, lead to the same goal,—Brahman.

Noren, as the Swami Vivekananda, realised this and on one occasion when asked if the Gods were real, said, "I believe in Brahman and the Gods"! As to the relative reality of the Gods, he said that these were real because Brahman is real, and that they could be seen, even as the saints have seen them. But this must be treated later on in a psychological manner, explaining how a great idea, intensely held in mind, gradually visualises and objectifies itself to the thinker, even as the discovery of the scientist is the theory embodied in actual vision, through the instrumentality of his test-tubes and measurements.

The Gods are real, also, because they are spiritual images, or "Logoi" of Brahman. The Pure Idea, the Word, of Brahman which they represent, is real in the deepest sense. The Pure Idea becomes objectified to the devotee in ecstatic vision, or becomes incarnate amongst men, as Saviour and Redeemer. The *Logos* or *Word* appears as *Flesh*. That is, it assumes ideal or actual embodiment. And according to the development of the spiritual ideas and vision possessed by each soul, does it approach the dignity and divinity of becoming itself a *Logos* or *Word* of that Godhead which is Brahman. The method of realisation is through a process of becoming, through a constant enlargement of vision, until the moment dawns when the individual soul realises itself as an Image or *Logos* or *Word* or *Pure Idea* of Brahman. The next step is that of the *Logos* merging in Brahman.

The objective characteristics of earthly life, the words and thoughts and deeds, in the transition between birth and death,—are translated into the tendency of personality for the re-projection of consciousness in future incarnation, whether on this earth or elsewhere. As man approaches the consciousness of reality through a constant purification of thought, desire and action, he approximates the condition of a *Logos*. When the goal has been attained, as the Buddha and the Christ attained it, the individual soul is itself *the Word made Flesh*.

It stands before mankind as the Incarnation. There is an Ideal Unit Individuality which each soul is trying to express. Having expressed it, it becomes Divinity. In the constant transfiguration of personality through repeated existences is the end reached. The conscious act of the past is transmuted into the instinct of the future. After all, instinct is sub-conscious memory. Through the purification of instinct by the efforts of the conscious mind the goal is attained. Such is the process of the soul's realising itself as a *Logos* or Aspect of Reality,—verily, as Brahman.

In this sense all religions are equally methods for the attainment of Supreme Realisation. Religion is to be judged, not from a point of view of organisation, or of any outward symbols, ceremonials or forms, or established theology. Religion is a condition of consciousness, a state of spiritual awareness on the part of personality. It is purely subjective. It is inner illumination. So it is understood in India. The religious organisation is only a social phenomenon ; it is a method, a means to an end. And, as a social phenomenon, it is subject to change and to betterment. Regarded in this light, the religion of each nation is best suited to its peculiar racial temperament and inheritance. Such is the liberality of the Hindu point of view wherein no intolerance or persecution is to be found.

Ramakrishna was the first human soul to detect this eclectic value in his own personal spiritual insight. He understood it, not as theory, but as vision and realisation. Noren, the foremost of his disciples, preached this message of his master when he became the Swami Vivekananda. He told Christians that Christianity was their path, and that Jesus the Christ was actually God incarnate, being of the reality of Brahman. The present interpretation is wrong. Christ was not only the Son of God, but verily He is God Himself. In worshipping Him one worships the Brahman. In Brahman, the One Self of all things, all personality soars into Real Individuality. As a visualisation of Brahman, Jesus the Christ still lives, more real even than His worship-

per. He *is* the Father and whosoever realises Him, verily becomes the Father. Verily he becomes Brahman. And so is it true of Rama and Sri Krishna, of Chaitanya and of Buddha and Zarathustra, and of Mohammed and Saint Francis of Assisi and of all the other glorious spiritual personalities which have been made manifest unto man. There may be a confusion of tongues with regard to the details and accuracy of their lives from an historic point of view. But as visions of truth their existence is not to be questioned. In the human mind they still dwell, more intensely than any historic personality. They have become identified, above all personality, with the ideal that has been built up about their names. Each person must be spoken to in his own religious language, as it were. Jesus for the Christians, Rama, Krishna and the glorious many other Hindu Incarnations for the Hindus, Mohammed for the Mohammedans. This was the conviction of the Swami Vivekananda. It was likewise his message, and that it happened to be so was because he had sat at the Feet of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the Synthesis of all religious and mystical consciousness. How this liberal spirit was transmitted to Noren will be heard of in his wonderful relationship with the Master.

This ideal of the Vedanta must spread. Such was Sri Ramakrishna's message to the world as preached by the Swami Vivekananda. The oneness of all religions would then be recognised. Then all religions of the world would live side by side even as they do in India ; all would welcome the ideals of the others. All would be understood as separate methods for seeing the same vision. In this synthesis all religions would be one, all worshippers, worshippers of the same Divine Reality, and true brotherhood would come to pass. Sectarianism would die out. All the Sons of Man would be seen equally, in the same religious and spiritual illumination, as Radiant Visions of Brahman. "Who attains to this consciousness is greater than the greatest," say the Upanishads.

Verily, Vedanta is the enunciation of the Hindu racial

experience and custom and thought. Freedom is the goal, freedom from all limitations, even from the limitation of life itself. In Hinduism the goal of both religion and society is one. With the Hindus life itself is religion. The social customs are guided by religious injunctions, and are reminders of spiritual verities. Behind each custom, like the meaning behind a word, is the religious intention, either conscious or instinctive. And the intention is always the realisation of higher aspects and stages of reality, all pointing, ultimately, to That which is Brahman.

Vedantism has been spoken of by those of surface ways of thinking as pessimism. In reality what higher motive of life can there be for work and for the making of personal character and realisation than the thought that all this is Brahman, that the world, though unreal, is the temporary play-ground for the expressions of the ideals and purposes of the Most High? In this attitude of mind and heart, life and death lose their separate and terrible distinctions and become luminous radiations of that effulgence which is the Highest Divinity. One works then without personal attachment, because the work and the motive for work, and the worker are all the same Brahman. One sees the increasing progress of all human aspiration and human realisation as a constant approximation to that exalted state,—which is Brahman,—where all dreams end, where all desire is lost in the ocean of realisation, and where Subject and Object are one.

From this it will be seen that all the apparent diversity in Hinduism is united into one complex and yet harmonious whole by this sublime ideal of Brahman. That throughout is the unity of Hinduism. As a spiritual organism Hinduism possesses the most perfect sense of oneness and unity the world has ever seen. The spiritual organism which is Hinduism, is the background of the Hindu national life. Therefore, though seemingly such a vast heterogeneous phenomenon, Hinduism is socially and religiously a unity throughout the Indian peninsula.

This understanding of Hinduism comes as the result of

much thought and much experience. It comes with the spirit of unprejudicedness and a real sincerity in the effort to understand. One needs enter in this matter into the very core of Hinduism, by making the life of the people a study and a realisation. For, as has been said, the philosophy of the Hindus is the utterance of their social existence. One must see it in this light, otherwise one misses the point of view. Seen through a wrong or provincial perspective, Hinduism is likely to appear as a mass of incoherent polytheism and as a disorganised social body. It was through a distorted angle that Noren saw Hinduism when he had become a Brahmo and when his mind had become Westernised by the exclusive study of the Western social and educational methods.

But the perspective of Noren's vision changed when he came into contact with his *Guru*, Sri Ramakrishna. Naturally, it took some time and much loving patience on the part of the Master to train his disciple out of all his preconceived views into the true, real understanding. It was a struggle between the two souls, that of the Master and that of the disciple. The intellect of Noren had to be convinced. It became convinced; and that is why Swami Vivekananda respected Sri Ramakrishna as the greatest intellect he had ever seen. For the Master had vanquished in him his Western egotistical consciousness of superiority over Hindu civilisation. He had shown to him that Hinduism had not sprung up all of a sudden, but that it was a great river of human and historic experience and reality, having its source in the very dawn of civilisation, and that its culture could match as equal, if not vastly superior, to any other. He made Noren realise that the very antiquity and the very mistakes of Hinduism guaranteed its historic expression and human accuracy and value. And as to the future, there is sure to be a renewal of ancient glories. Noren, after much mental conflict with his master, finally came to accept Hinduism as a glorious human reality, whether considered in its religious or in its social aspects. It is *true*, he thought

to himself. And ever afterwards, though he made repeated tests of the inherent values of Hinduism, and though he had travelled in most parts of the world and had studied the culture of many nations, he remained convinced, to the very end, that Hinduism had a message and a mission and that it represented certain invaluable and indispensable ideals for the improvement and progress of the whole human race.

But it was a great struggle to understand this. It was a matter of many strenuous days and months. It was an education through which Noren was compelled to pass at the Feet of his Master until the latter cast off the body and entered the Highest Reality. Even after that it was a constant personal study with him, a constant widening of vision, and a deeper and deeper insight. The spiritual realisation which is Hinduism Noren saw realistically personified in the life and character of Sri Ramakrishna. But he saw it only in gradual forms and in a graduating manner. At first he laughed at his spiritual teacher. Though he came to love him, it was only after years that he came to understand him. And the process of understanding his master became his own constant spiritual realisation and the birth of Neo-Hinduism in his thought. In order that this spiritual outlook be preserved, the Swami Vivekananda called for the reconstruction of Hinduism, as a society, the process being not from without, but from organic changes and gradual enlightenment from within. All reform must come, he felt assured, from an enlightened perception, a gradual education from the old and holy and once useful modes to the still holier forms to suit the modern requirements. It was because the spirit of Hinduism, which is its religion, and the body of Hinduism, which is its society, are so inseparably interwoven, and because of his contact with Sri Ramakrishna and his new view of Hinduism as a religion, that Noren became the champion of Hindu society as well, not, however, as a reactionary, but as a master-architect who builds on a great scale, using the *best* materials available.

Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, one in their vision, one

in their purport, it might be said, one even in their personalities, were the makers of the Hinduism of to-day,—a Hinduism without any apology, an aggressive, gloriously self-conscious Hinduism, whose Spirit is the Brahman of the Vedas and the Vedanta, and whose form is the nexus of growing Hindu life. The vision of Hinduism is fixed unalterably and invincibly in That Eternal which is Brahman. Each nation has contributed to the cause of human enlightenment. So long as it continues to do so it will stand, and when it fails to do so it will fall. And the Spirit of Hinduism lives immortal, because BRAHMAN is ETERNAL.

XXXI

THE MYSTICAL CONSCIOUSNESS.

Having understood and accepted the ideals in Hinduism, Noren began that weaving and colouring of spiritual self-consciousness about them, the heightening of which constitutes the mystical consciousness of Hinduism. Each moment in his spiritual training with his master, when he had understood or accepted any new aspect of Hinduism or the teaching of Sri Ramakrishna, it was at one and the same time an intellectual and spiritual illumination. With Noren the intellectual awareness of truth brought the religious and spiritual consciousness of truth in its wake. His intellectual sincerity and his spiritual sincerity were one; therefore, his intellectual illumination and his spiritual illumination were contemporaneous growths in the making of that personality which was to be the Swami Vivekananda.

Before entering upon the subject of the mystical consciousness of Hinduism, as possessed and interpreted by Sri Ramakrishna and his chief disciple, it is peremptorily essential to understand the term *mysticism* itself. And no better definition can be presented as regards both what it is and what it is not than to quote from the preface of "Mysticism," a work mentioned in an earlier chapter.

"One of the most abused words in the English language, it has been used in different and often mutually exclusive senses by religion, poetry, and philosophy: has been claimed as an excuse for every kind of occultism, for dilute transcendentalism, vapid symbolism, religious or aesthetic sentimentality, and bad metaphysics. On the other hand, it has been freely employed as a term of contempt by those who have criticized these things....

"... those who use the term 'Mysticism' are bound in self-defence to explain what they mean by it. Broadly speaking, I understand it to be the expression of the innate

tendency of the human spirit towards complete harmony with the transcendental order; whatever be the theological formula under which that order is understood. This tendency, in great mystics, gradually captures the whole field of consciousness; it dominates their life and, in the experience called 'mystic union,' attains its end. Whether that end be called the God of Christianity, the World-soul of Pantheism, the Absolute of Philosophy, the desire to attain it and the movement towards it—so long as this is a genuine life-process and not an intellectual speculation—is the proper subject of mysticism. I believe this movement to represent the true line of development of the highest form of human consciousness."

Mysticism is, indeed, a life-process whereby what is purely theological or philosophical to the ordinary man, is transmuted into a glowing spiritual reality with one who is possessed of the mystical consciousness. Ordinarily, philosophy is a speculation made up of remarkably well-ordered *guesses* at truth,—for only so can they be called. They are cleverly balanced theories, subject, however, to dispute as to their accuracy, and at all times open to debate. They are well-appointed and well-calculated diagrams of truth and reality. But more than that, they are nothing. To the mystic, philosophy becomes a statement of *facts* actually perceived through and subordinate to the medium of an illuminated consciousness, wherein pure abstract definitions of truth are transformed into living, throbbing realities, *fierce with meaning*. To the mystic, philosophy becomes a great motive power for the awakening of the spiritual consciousness. To others, it is, for the most part, purely academic, having no power of stimulus in the arousing and response of consciousness. Unquestionably, the end of all philosophical study should be a transfiguration of personality, the convictions of the mind becoming emotional possessions of consciousness. That is to say, to the mystic, the purpose embodied in all philosophical enquiry and finding, is that the *idea* of the Absolute, or the *conception* of God shall

transcend a purely intellectual understanding and become a *state of awareness*. Mysticism is a seeing, a hearing, a touching, a tasting, a complete consciousness of reality and truth. The whole personality takes part in the process, not only the mind, but the senses also. The sense faculties become developed beyond their normal functions in the capacity to receive and interpret impressions. Truth appears to the mystic, not in the subjectivity of a highly developed intellectualism only ; it objectifies itself in his intense search for truth ; it reveals itself to the complete consciousness. The senses are no longer merely physical, but have become spiritual, in their functions, and serve in the spiritual transfiguration, becoming the media for the realistic perception of truth. That which is truth and reality, in the world or beyond it, presses in upon personality in the same manner as the physical universe reveals its existence to the senses in the constant impact of vibration, and the whole personality is stimulated to response in this pressure. Truth and reality are as actual, one might say, as the physical world, even more so, because of their very subjectivity, for, they compose the Divine Nature. They arouse and heighten the human faculties into an even more than ordinary activity, and produce even greater and more intense excitations of consciousness. This condition of personality is known as the mystical consciousness.

Let it be remembered, however, that the final revelations of truth and reality are beyond any external perception ; they are finally not objective ; finally they do not express themselves through the senses, even when these are most highly spiritualised. The average mystics perceive truth as the ordinary saints have done ; that is, they behold their ideal as manifested outside their personality, as another entity or object. But the greatest, the most exalted mystic passes over and transcends this objective form of perception, and in the process of transcending, very frequently, aye, if not always, he doubts his own mystical experience, but not in the agnostic sense. His very doubt is in itself a sublimity of faith, for he believes that there is still a higher, a more subjective and

spiritual perception of reality and truth. Then he gradually attains the ultimate goal which is the summit of all personal realisation. Those manifold revelations which he previously perceived as *outside* himself, he finally comes to know in the unit and highest spiritual experience as, verily, *within* himself as the substance of personality, and even beyond this, even as the substance of Divine Life. From this exalted height he now understands the more objective revelations of truth to have been true and real, but only in degree. He sees that the visions which were his, of God and truth and reality, in personified or manifold forms, were true, but in the climax of the spiritual consciousness all these objective manifestations merge in an all-overreaching and divine subjectivity. He who formerly, as the saint, saw God, verily now has become one with God. This is the Hindu interpretation of the mystical consciousness, and this the Hindu saints have spoken of as the Nirvikalpa-Samadhi, the highest of all spiritual realisations. The man has transcended the boundaries of human personality, which was only a phenomenon in the reaching of the goal. Real Individuality was the Divine Life for which he was striving and which he has attained, and now he has merged in the spiritual substance of all personality. This is the climax to which all personality must reach in the fulfilment of the spiritual aspiration and in the attainment of that True Individuality which the Upanishads call Brahman.

This lengthy explanation of the mystical consciousness, though in the nature of a digression, is nevertheless essential in order to understand the coming stages in the evolution of Noren's mystical experience. One will find him possessed of great revelations of truth in its objective forms, but then, strange to say, one finds him later on in a state of doubt with regard to these very experiences. For example, he doubts his own vision of Kali the Mother and of other Divine Forms. As has been said, however, it was not the doubt of an agnostic, but that doubt which is a sublimity of faith by which the soul reaches out for *Final Things*. Then, too, through the power of Sri Ramakrishna he had reached the Utmost

Realisation when but a youth. Thereafter, it was quite natural that he should hesitate to accept any objective revelations as ultimate definitions and perceptions of reality. That Realisation lingered in the deeps of his consciousness ; and therefore, his mind always paused in accepting lesser revelations. Thus whenever he attained the summit of the spiritual consciousness, he surveyed all the past mystical experience which was his, from that great vantage-ground. Then he knew that *all* his personal realisations, whether of the least or the mightiest in point of character and description, were *true*. But in these moments of insight he commenced, in the deeper stages of meditation, to throw off all bonds. The last step was the triumphant re-awareness of his innermost nature and the divine reality of Nirvana which he entered, throwing off the body and all other objective characteristics of which his soul had been possessed.

Without understanding this, the student of the life of the Swami Vivekananda and the ardent, unquestioning disciple might not comprehend how it came to pass that a man of such religious realisation as the Swami could ever doubt his own states of spiritual awareness. He doubted them, not as regards their own relative intrinsic value, but as ultimate perceptions of reality. In the same way, even Sri Ramakrishna doubted his own states of realisation. He mercilessly surveyed all of them. It was a divine dissatisfaction with him, for he demanded the Highest Truth ; he made great efforts to realise it ; aye, he bit the dust in his agony. Finally he attained it and was one with God. But on the road to this great attainment, and when in the midst of his great doubting and struggle for higher realisation, he said to some rich Marwaris who held him in great respect and to whom his nephew Hriday was praising him, "Sirs, pay no attention to what this man tells you. He wishes to impress you with my spirituality so that you will favour me with riches ; in truth I am, as you see, a madman." Was ever a religious teacher so sincere with himself ! Was ever a human being struggling towards Reality such a studious and inexorable

analyser of his own states of mind! It was because of this keen struggle and the realisation which it brought forth that his words were as priceless treasures. They rang with a triumphant spirit. One was sure that he could tell no lies, that he exaggerated nothing, that he was possessed of no spiritual egotism, and that he cared nothing for the position of a great spiritual teacher. And thus one hears him say with marvellous insight and with tremendous sincerity, that when the lotus of the spiritual consciousness is in full blossom the bees, that is, souls who are eager and sincere seekers of spiritual truth, will come of themselves. And in his case this proved to be overwhelmingly and gloriously true. Now Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa is recognised as an Avatâra, or Incarnation of the Most High, by hundreds of thousands; and millions have heard of him and bow down to him as the Saviour of souls.

The same doubts, the same persistency in the effort to realise the Highest Consciousness, in its purely subjective essence beyond all relative visions and objective forms of revelation, are to be found in all great religious experience. They are witnessed in the narrative of Jesus the Christ and that of Gautama the Buddha. Even they had their moments when they threw overboard, as it were, all lesser stages of realisation, passing through the Valley of Doubt upwards and upwards to the Mountain Heights of God. The story of Mâra, the tempter of Buddha, and that of the Evil One, the tempter of Christ, tells, under a popular symbolism, the struggles of every soul in the vanquishing of all doubt and spiritual obstacles on its way to Highest Realisation.

Every soul has a tendency towards the mystical consciousness. It may be expressed in one mood or another, but it is always there. It may be clouded over by the matter-of-fact education the mind undergoes in childhood or in youth, or by the matter-of-fact outlook on life to which one has come, by way of experience and environment. This tendency is dormant in the most unimaginative. It is semi-conscious in the poet, the artist, the musician and the philosopher. It be-

comes manifest even to these of ordinary type, in all those super-normal outbursts of feeling or insight that come in unusual moments of their life. It is faintly discernible in the depths of every man's life; but it is developed fully in the personality of the saint and seer. Even knowledge is only a process in feeling. The discovery of truth is never purely intellectual; in the end, it is always the triumph of the *feeling* for reality; in the end, it is not the outcome of thought, but of vision. The intellectual consciousness is only a refraction of a deeper awareness, and when it attains its highest function it bursts forth as the sure vision, the unmistakable consciousness and feeling of reality. When the philosopher's vision is deepest, he no longer *thinks*. He *sees*. Raphael meditating day after day on the glory of the Blessed Virgin, sees, in the state of dream, that radiant vision which he interprets on canvas as the Sistine Madonna. The meditation sank into the depths of consciousness as vision, re-emerging as creative faculty in art. But then, so it is said, Raphael always painted on his knees.

All this must be borne in mind in the study of Noren's career, following his joining the Brahmo Samaj. Henceforth he is the mystic-in-the-making. Clearly examining his mental struggle through this long period, one finds that it is, after all, only the rumbling on the surface of the sea of his personality. It was the tempest of thought thrown to the surface by the strong undercurrents of his yearning for truth. It was because this state of the soul agitated him so impetuously that he broke loose from the moorings of early belief. He was without any guide to give him the direction, and yet somehow he was a born sailor on the ocean of that struggle for reality. Though he had now lost the compass of belief, and though the struggle to know became literal anguish, yet he felt sure that all would be well. That impetuous onrush within him of the sailor's instinct for the port, prevented him from going astray and brought him to the shore of knowledge whose landing-place is everlasting reality.

As recorded in a preceding chapter, Noren did not

silence the questionings of his mind. He did not whip off the promptings of a righteous doubt with the lash of a fanatic creed. Open, open was his soul to all that might come in. In it first came darkness, appalling darkness, intensified by anguish. But unlike most men, Noren did not light the lamps of desire and rest content in a worldly conception of life. He attempted to see even in the darkness ; and at last when it was darkest, he began to see truth as one vaguely sees some undefined object in the dark. He was hopeful. But that did not satisfy him ; he demanded that actual vision *must* come.

Thus all along the mystical consciousness obsessed Noren. The more he struggled against it, the more insistently it arose within the silence of his soul, and even at that very time when the mind appeared to have succeeded in overthrowing the religious tendency. Added to the struggle of the mind he received the blows of much worldly misfortune, which falling upon one generally blunt, if not fatally stunned, the intuitional sense. The student of the Swami Vivekananda's life thus catches a glimpse of the depth of the mystical tendency in his nature and, also, of its struggle for expression. If tendency is the reflection of former efforts, how great were the efforts which his soul must have made in the past. When ultimately he came out of the darkness into the glory of the divine light, then That which he had alternately thought upon with such anguish and such ecstasy, became for him the spiritual vision. The mystical consciousness is always born of the greatest struggle. He who recognises the *past* of the personality of the emotional saint, fathoms the intellectual struggle that the soul of such must have known anterior to its present conformation of consciousness.

To the mystic-who-is-to-be, the longing for truth is a burning desire, a consuming passion. It is the certain foreshadowing, as well, of the realisation and the vision which are to come. It is not unreasonable, then, that the thoughts of the mystic philosopher should pass into the spiritual and symbolic

forms perceived by the sage. That thought becomes visualised to the thinker is no longer considered strange. It is now a well-known phenomenon for the study of the advanced psychologist, who no longer wonders at the so-called marvels of telepathy, thought-projection, hyperæsthesia, hyperkinesis, auto-suggestion, self-cure, and so forth. In the realm of science, the discovery made by the intellect fashions itself into the scientific test, the sure proof. Is it any stranger, then, that the longing for truth, the intellectual discovery of truth, felt and realised by the saint, should express itself in some wonderful mode of spiritual or heightened human perception than that the test instrument and discovery of the scientist be the result of his penetrating search into the heart of the material universe?

This makes it comprehensible why Noren, the intellectual genius, should have become the mystic, and why the intellectual states of his mind should pass into states of intense feeling. This explains why he became a spiritual genius and a seer of the *forms* of truth. Aye, the whole substance of truth, which man dreams of as God, or as the Highest Reality, pressing through the channels of an enlightened intelligence as philosophical verity, may burst suddenly upon the soul, in those heightened and quickened states of consciousness called ecstasy, as the very Vision of God, or as the Awareness of the Highest Self.

The mystical consciousness constantly pressed upon Noren for expression. As a member of the Brahmo Samaj he felt himself comparatively free and relieved from that turmoil of thought he had undergone. Still, the gospel proclaimed by its leaders though monotheistic and profoundly intellectual, did not fully satisfy that burning thirst he possessed for the actual awareness of Reality.

Hereafter, Noren's life is that of the saint-in-the-making. It is no longer his mind to which one pays unfaltering attention, though it becomes more and more luminous as the years grow; it is his heart, his very soul, his vision that captivates attention. Henceforth the soul of Noren turns

towards the fullness of its expression. Previously its radiance was as that of the crescent moon, the dark side standing in relief. This was the doubting period of his intellectual self. But a time was coming when the whole orb of his soul was to shine forth with the radiance and glory of the full moon. He was to attain unto the very highest possibilities of the mystical consciousness, wherein the soul and the Supreme Reality were revealed as a perfect and indistinguishable unity. In that imperious question of his soul, "Mahâshaya, have you seen God?" spoken by Noren to the Maharshi Debendra Nath, there is noticed the dawn of the mystical consciousness.

Before that event it was the night of the soul in which the intellect ruled and doubt was supreme; but even then were heard, though faintly so, the footsteps of an approaching dawn. And that dawn grew into the day of glorious vision in a garden some distance from Calcutta in the effulgent presence of Sri Ramakrishna, the Sun of Truth.

Hereafter, one witnesses a curious admixture of the saint who desires uttermost abandonment to his ideal, and the philosopher desiring to test each vision with the analytical power of an awakened mind. Now is heard the voice of ecstasy, and then the voice of the severe intellectual analysis. Even until the end Noren scrutinised, but this made him all the surer, all the deeper, all the more convinced. Sinking the plummet of analysis deep into the ocean of his soul, he found that realisation was ever beyond the boundaries of the mind. In this fashion he likewise tested Sri Ramakrishna himself, and in the end came to revere him all the more for that.

Noren became more and more satisfied with his spiritual growth. That his mind came to this rich maturity was undoubtedly due to that period of stress and pain he had gone through, in which the gold of his soul was cleansed from all dross of superstition and fanatical blindness of faith in the hottest fires of tribulation and unrest. Ever in search for reality, Noren's intellectual quest for truth always kept pace with the magnitude of his spiritual realisation. Realising the place of the intellect in the development of the spiritual

process, he always allowed the loophole of intellectual freedom for himself and later on for his disciples, saying that whatever he realised as truth to-day he would change if he was blessed with a higher vision on the morrow. He was the saint and devotee,—but the saintly temperament which sometimes grows fanatic, he controlled by the power of discrimination. For his was not only the illuminated heart, but the illuminated intelligence as well.

He saw all that the saint sees, and knew all that the saint knows. He had the saint's visions, and as such he heard voices coming from afar. He sang with the singer in praise of the Lord and danced with the devotees in religious joy. He revelled in the ecstasies of the saint, and yet, in the firmament of his personal world, was the sun of a luminous intelligence that made the saint in him, aye, the seer as well. He had not only the Dualist's vision of God and the soul as wonderful but separate realities. He was also possessed of the Advaita Vedantin's vision of the Supreme Self, the Brahman, in each and every soul. He saw Divinity as both Personal and Impersonal, and this was because as the background of his realisation was the monistic idea of the Vedanta that all is God. The Vedanta maintains that the sense of "I" is an error, that the world is a dream, that only the real Self, which is Absolute Knowledge, Blessedness, Existence and Peace, reigns, and that only God is. Pondering for years in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna and thereafter, throughout his lifetime meditating within the solitude of himself, the monistic *idea* became with Noren the vivid and veritable consciousness of the monistic *Reality*.

And yet he knew the Dualist's beatitude, the beatitude of the worshipper in his God. He denied no spiritual experience, for he embodied in himself the synthesis of the mystical consciousness, even as his Master, rising into exaltation at the very Name of God, and yet, rising higher and still higher, into that Silence which is God, where the Self is seen in God, where the Self is realised as God, the Sole Reality, because God alone *is*. This is the region of the

Formless and Eternal, where intelligence soars beyond thought, the region of Nirvana into which the soul enters in the climax of attainment. This is Mukti, the essence of all freedom, into the peace and endless beatitude of which the soul, liberated from all fetters, soars at last. Then the body-idea has gone ; then even the mind-idea has gone. The soul is seen as the Soul. Verily, then only Reality *is*



XXXII

RAMAKRISHNA—KALI—BRAHMAN.

As the one sun, though reflected in innumerable pools of water, is still the same sun, even so is Brahman, though represented under innumerable and widely varied forms which are the Gods, still the one and Same Brahman. Thus all the Gods are complementary, the idea of one inferring the idea of another, the worship of one involving the worship of the others.

In the early dawn of the spiritual life, the philosophical temperament becomes conscious of the Gods, as the embodiments of great ideas. At least in the instance of Noren this was true. According to philosophical Hinduism, the Gods are representations of eternal realities, and they dwell in the consciousness of mankind as spiritual entities. The mind transcending its ordinary functioning through the power of intense concentration, *sees* these ideal existences as the forms of truth. And each genuine life-process is a method in *seeing*, for the intellect is possessed of the faculty of subjective vision. Otherwise, how could any truth be discovered? The mind perceives certain aspects of a body of reality, which are as objective to the subjective vision as physical objects are to physical sight. In the language of Hinduism the forms and aspects of truth *are* the Gods. Through the expansion of the philosophical vision, the Hindu philosopher becomes the saint; through the perspective of a fully developed intellect, the Hindu devotee sees the Gods as great motive powers for the spiritual awakening and the deification of human nature. He perceives them as inciting forces to a development of the moral sense and the cherishing of spiritual ideals. He sees them as the spiritual forces which stimulate personality to a reaching out beyond itself. In short, to the philosophic mystic, the Gods are, in one sense, the ideals of human character.

In India where the general understanding in matters of religion is by no means of an inferior character, the large majority of the people instinctively accept the Gods as they are understood philosophically, that is to say, as manifestations of Brahman. The Puranas, the Hindu treatises concerning the Gods, are replete with grand conceptions of deity. The Gods are herein described as manifestations of truth, verily as truth itself. From their very infancy the Hindus are brought up on this Pouranic culture. Thus they breathe in, as it were, the highest notions of divinity at that age when the mind is most formative and receptive to impressions. They look upon the Gods as the saving powers, assisting the devotee out of the prison-house of the world into the great beatitude and freedom of the Divine Consciousness. The Hindus understand that, even as there are numerous great ideas and numerous phases and representations of reality and truth, even so there are numerous Gods ; aye, and that every human soul is a God-in-the-making. The unobservant critic cries, "Polytheism," not comprehending the assembly of ideas which are back of the images and symbols. To the Hindu mind all great ideas exist, before their discovery, as Living Parts of the Real, and are thus eternal. For this reason the Hindu speaks of his Scriptures and of the Gods as eternal. They are a great grouping-together of eternal verities, to be realised in definite and concrete forms.

In worshipping the Gods, it may be that the ideas and spiritual verities of which they are names and forms, are best brought home to the understanding of the masses. As stated elsewhere each God becomes gradually endowed, in the popular mind, with the highest conception of divinity ; that is, it is recognised as Brahman. In this manner the Gods are seen to be the aspects of the illuminated spiritual consciousness, and thus embody the core and substance of realisation which arises in the intensity of meditation. The method may be either emotional or intellectual. It is all the same. Intensified, either in thought or in feeling, the idea of which the God is the ideal entity is actual to spiritual perception,

taking form in the creative power of the devotee's aspiration. Verily, truth is only truth as it is seen, felt, realised, experienced and known. In the transfigured consciousness, *reality is no longer of an intellectual nature ; it is life ; it is experience ; it is a seeing ; it is visible embodiment.*

Thus it becomes apparent why Sri Ramakrishna told Noren that he had *seen* God. His consciousness had soared aloft in a wonderful response to the *Idea*, until his intensified vision saw, beyond the *Idea*, the Divine Reality Itself. The various faculties through which personality is specialised, such as seeing, hearing, touching, had in his case taken part in a divine transmutation of idea into consciousness. He truly *saw* God.

Thus was Sri Ramakrishna the living embodiment of the mystical consciousness. The Hindu methods of visualising Brahman or Absolute Truth are many and varied. Sri Ramakrishna had set himself to the task of realising all of them. He succeeded, but only after prodigious effort. Because of his own difficulties in the way of realisation, the Master was patient with his disciple. He was even *more* loving to Noren when he found him challenging his realisations as hallucinations. Sri Ramakrishna lived in the world of divine forms, and he had trained his mind in the immediate perception of spiritual verities. He was a theist, polytheist and amonist. He had realised the Gods as manifestations of Brahman. He had seen them merge in a higher condition of reality, where perception is one and the vision is of Brahman. He had come to know his own soul in the light of the Supreme Existence and had forgotten his own personality. He was always conscious of Brahman, either in Its Divine Manifestations, or within Its Own Nature, or through the Radiance and Glorified Nothingness of his own personality.

What tempest and transports of ecstasy, what exalted states were with him constantly ! To him Samâdhi was a natural state. He was more than the ordinary Hindu saint. He had taken upon himself the whole task of realisation. He had transcended personality, so that he regarded himself

as the Son of God, the Child of the Mother, the Image of Brahman. He saw Brahman in all those personal forms under which the Divinity is conceived of and worshipped by the Hindus. Not alone that. In the rapturous exaltation of vision, his spiritual sight took in creeds and Gods foreign to the consciousness of the Hindu. He became the Moham-medan to realise Allah, and he became the Christian to realise Christ.

Sri Ramakrishna was a Seer. He had also like Noren passed through a tempest of thought, but not of that intellectual type which had characterised his disciple's growth. Sri Ramakrishna's was a tempest of soul. In his agony to see God he brought upon himself serious physical affliction. He was the ascetic among ascetics. He bit the very dust of the earth in his unspeakable anguish to *see* God ! His realisation was the outcome of unknown and incommu-nicable worlds of pain. Therefore he understood and loved Noren the deeper. He saw that Noren's intellect would always doubt, because of his very impetuosity for truth. But he also saw that Noren's soul would conquer in the end. It would transform the intellect into the illumination which comes when the Self knows the Self, as the Vedas say. Sri Ramakrishna knew that Noren would transcend all limitations and throw overboard all the elements of worldly consciousness. He would become a spiritual giant, a master of the spiritual consciousness. This, however, was to come only in time and after great struggle. Then, indeed, all doubts would be solved, and the realms and powers of the heart would open to view. Noren would then be aware that God *is*, not only in an intellectual sense, but spiritually, as well ; for he was literally to *see* God, and this is infinitely more than knowledge. It is the insight in which all knowl-edge culminates.

Sri Ramakrishna was a realist in the world of ideals. The ideal had become to him the real, in a transfigured sense. Truth and reality had literally possessed him. Even as man ordinarily calls real only those things which the senses reveal

in concrete form, even so did Sri Ramakrishna realise in substance and in luminous actuality the whole body and spirit of supreme reality. Had he not said to Noren, "I see God even in an intensely more real sense than I see you!"

The speciality in the mystical consciousness of Sri Ramakrishna was what he called Kali, the Goddess whose emblem is death and destruction. To the Hindu She is the incarnation of Time which engulfs all things. She is the form of Death which destroys all. Therefore, Her garlands are a necklace of skulls, and the garment about Her loins is composed of severed arms, while in Her hand She holds a bleeding head. Her dance is the dance of destruction and Her shrine, the burning-ground. For the background of Her personality She has the night and the chaos of things. *How real is the idea! Even so real is She!* How shocking the symbols which adorn Her! Yet, how true! As Noren was later accustomed to say of Her, "They put garlands of flowers about Thee, O Thou Terrible One, and call Thee, O my Mother, the Merciful!" He meant thereby that the majority dare not see Kali as the Goddess of destruction, the Goddess of death, and so try to soften their idea of Her. The idea of Kali is one of the inevitable elements in the make-up of the mystical consciousness. In one way or another the idea comes to the foreground in every religious system. And yet Kali is Brahman. For does not the idea of the Eternal rise in the mind when all ideas of the temporal and the mortal have been crushed out! The hollowness and the terrible emptiness of things strike like a thunderbolt upon consciousness, and eternity rises above the destruction of time. When the Mother has danced the dance of destruction in the heart of Her devotee, lo, only the consciousness of the Soul as the Infinite Subject remains. That which is Brahman only remains. Thus *Kali is Brahman*. By contrast She points to the reality of the Supreme Consciousness.

Sri Ramakrishna worshipped Kali as the Mother, and as Brahman. He realised Her in Her terrible forms and also as the Blessedness and Bliss of Brahman. The Personal

Kali became merged, in his realisation, in the Impersonal. To him She was the Giver of Samâdhi or superconscious insight.

To Sri Ramakrishna Kali, the Herald of Death, was also the Giver of Immortality. Aye, the Mother gives death to the man of desires. She hurls the man of fame into the abyss of oblivion and exalts the humble and the meek. She is the manifestation of the Eternal to Her devotee and is called the Consort of the Lord of *Yogins*. Having seen Her in Her terrible forms, the mind longs for the Indestructible Consciousness of the Lord, who knows no dreams, who is above all pain and all the mirage of living, and who is beyond all thought and form. "Kali—Shiva! Shiva—Kali!" These are one in the meaning of the Ideal which They represent. For this reason They are popularly regarded as husband and wife; but to the philosophical devotee they are the embodiment of the most exalted ideas to which the human mind can ever aspire. Shiva is the Pure Consciousness, free from all ideas of body and from all bondage, and Kali, by Her inscrutable terrors shows the changefulness and limitations of all dreams. She becomes Uma-Gouri-Haimavati, All-tenderness and Divinity of Love personified to him who throws overboard the warp and woof of sense and plunges through the seeming chaos and terrible destruction which Her forms bear, into the Beatific Consciousness of Pure Divinity. Then the Mother reveals Herself as the Ocean of Reality, whose Heart is the throbbing of the Infinite Soul. In Her the saint sees the Expanse of the Infinite, the Akhanda Sat-Chit-Ananda, Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute and Bliss Absolute. In Her the saint sees Shiva, the Eternal and Imperishable. The images reveal Her as most terrible, dancing on the body of Her Consort, Shiva. So She is to Her devotee until that moment when he is no longer in the bondage of sense. Then She is the Beneficent One, the Radiant Vision of Infinite Beauty and Beatitude;—and She and Shiva are One.

Verily every human being is the son of the Mother. Verily is the whole universe come out of Her womb. All are sons of Change, Time and Destruction. Blessed is he that realises Her who is the Weaver of Dreams. Then, dancing with the Mother, he dances through time into eternity, through death into immortality.

This is the Grand Vision of Hinduism. Aye, it is the most glorious and unique possession of the Hindu religious consciousness.

To Sri Ramakrishna all these were wonderful realities. He saw the Reality as the Infinite Mother. For him, Kali held the scales of life and death, and the keys of wisdom and ignorance. At Her bidding the world begins the whirl of Creation, and at Her bidding it ends in destruction. Yet She is, also, Incommunicable Peace. Sri Ramakrishna saw the Mother in all things. He likewise realised Her as the Indwelling Divinity of all souls. The Spirit of the Mother *is* the Spirit of Shiva. Though Her aspects be change and time and death and destruction, She is the Everlasting Reality of Shiva-Brahman. Sri Ramakrishna often became possessed by the Mother. His ideas of Her grew into such proportions of reality that the conscious mind gave way, and his soul shone forth as the Mother Herself. Lost in Samādhi, his whole body stiff, his arms unconsciously took the form of *Varābhaya*. Sri Ramakrishna was one in whom the spiritual powers of response were overwhelmingly sensitive. Once seeing a caged lion stalking up and down in the Zoological Gardens he entered into Samādhi, being carried away by the thought that he had seen the king of animals on which the Mother rides. He realised the Ganges as a Form of the Mother, as *Brahma-Vāri*. To him the living waters became a vast and mighty Being, whose Self arose at the Feet of Shiva in the celestial regions of the Himalayan heights in eternal snows and merged in the infinite expanse of the sea. It was to him a vision of the Mother playing Her part as a mighty power throughout the universe and then plunging into the

Great Sea of Eternity. The vastness of nature which man interprets in the wonders of speech and thought, became re-translated to Sri Ramakrishna as the Living Reality of Mother. To him the Mother was everywhere. Of what is embodied, She is the embodiment. Of what is ensouled, She is the ensoulment. She is the body ; She, the mind, the thought, the soul. Of all, She is the Self ! Beyond all and as all She dwells incarnate as the Active Power of Supreme Reality. "Brahman and Shakti are one," as the Master would say, even as fire and its heat, even as the milk and its white liquidness. The One Reality when static is the Brahman, when active it is the Shakti, the Mother." Verily She is absolutely beyond all speech and thought. Verily She is the Brahman of the Vedas and the Vedanta. She is the Immanence of things, the perfume of the flower, the splendours of Orion, the Soul of the Gods, the Terror of the Asuras, the Essence of Peace, and the Supreme Bliss and Silence which is Brahman.

At first Noren took this consciousness in Sri Ramakrishna to be hallucination ; then he found it to be illumination. Embodied in the ecstatic state, this realisation transformed Sri Ramakrishna into the Mother Herself—the *Idea*, *Kali*, and *Consciousness*, growing as a trinity into one single Truth. So great was the love of Sri Ramakrishna for Noren, so great his respect, also, for that innate insight which he perceived in him, that when the disciple doubted his realisations the Master, out of his simple and childlike nature, even went so far as to seriously question them and turned helplessly to the Mother Herself. And She showed him in a state of superconscious insight that all his realisations were true. Then did he turn to Noren, saying, "My Mother has shown me that your doubting is all foolishness and ignorance ! My Mother has shown me the truth !"

It was his experience with Sri Ramakrishna that made Noren believe in Brahman *and* the Gods. And Brahman and the Gods, seen through the perspective of a purified mind, are the all-encompassing truth with its innumerable aspects.

Indeed, truth and all true ideas are but shadows of Brahman and the Gods. And as shadows are lesser realities, even so are all intellectual truths. Within the embodiment which throws these shadows of thought do Brahman and the Gods exist. And Sri Ramakrishna, who perceived these as men perceive the world of the senses about them, grew into their image and likeness. Above all, he became the Spirit which they are, the One, the Real. He himself became one with Kali the Mother—the Kali-Brahman.

But Noren did not at first see this. So with all the power of his intellectual self he combated the realisation of the Master until he was literally *made* to see. Then he became *re-Hinduised*; he became the disciple; he became one with his Master's ideals. Aye, he saw That which the Master saw. He saw the Brahman Itself, becoming himself the Seer, the Sage, the Saint, the Man of God.



XXXIII

THE DAKSHINESWAR KALI-BARHI.

Rani Rashmoni was the munificent founder of the great Temple at Dakshineswar. She was the first lady of her caste. "Rani" signifies a queen. Her father gave her that name ; and rightly did he give it to her. She was not only a queen amongst her own people, but also a queen amongst women. Her heart was always open to the desires of her caste-people, amongst the poorest and the lowliest in the ranks of Hindu society. She was enormously rich, however ; and in this respect her lot differed much from the people from whom she arose. But she always remembered them. She was very kind also to the poor people at large, notably to those belonging to the fisherman caste. That certain parts of the river Ganges, in Calcutta, are open to them free of taxation is because she purchased these privileges at a great cost from the Government. She was thoroughly Hindu and Indian, filled with a great spirit and devoted to the cause of religion and the motherland. Her life shows to what heights of character and spirit a woman of India can rise, even though she be hampered by social restrictions in a thousand and one ways.

Rani Rashmoni was also a great worshipper of Kali, the Divine Mother. To this day her love and devotion to the Mother stand embodied in the famous, beautiful and splendid Temple of Kali, some four miles distant from Calcutta, in the Gardens of Dakshineswar. The house stands near by where she often lived so as to be near the Mother and see that the services to Her were rightly performed. She caused to be erected great kitchens in order that the Sadhus and hundreds of the poor who would come to worship might be properly fed. After the consecration of the Temples she endowed them with a substantial annual income. Any hour of the day the poor may come and be fed. Any hour of the day the

devotee may come and worship and be blessed, because she caused to be erected to the Divine Mother this wonderful Temple at Dakshineswar.

A fortune was spent in the construction. Another fortune was used to purchase the large acreage which is now the spacious gardens. Another fortune was employed in building the long, solid embankment to keep the waters of the Ganges from washing away the grounds and even perhaps the Temple itself, as has so often happened in the sacred city of Benares. For some reason this embankment was swept away when it had hardly been finished. A still larger fortune went towards its reconstruction.

Here, after the seat of the Mother had been beautified in every detail, came the Son of the Mother, Her devotee, Her child, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, whose personality was to fill the whole scene and even the Temple itself with wonderful and soul-stirring events. The Kâli-bârhi of Dakshineswar cannot now be dissociated from the personality of Sri Ramakrishna himself, even though his bodily presence has vanished from mortal view. Here he preached when he had long since forgotten that there was ever such a person born and known as Ramakrishna and when he knew himself as living only as the instrument of the Mother. Farther than that he had gone in the soaring of his realisation, in which state he was one with the Mother, the Brahman. Here he lived for a third of a century ; and marvellous is the tale of those days he spent in Dakshineswar. Here Noren came. Here Noren attained illumination, and here he lost sight of that which each man considers so important—himself. Verily, Dakshineswar is a *Tirtha*, a place of pilgrimage, for here two souls have seen God revealed as the Mother ; not alone in that form, however, but in many other forms, as well ; and, above all, in and as their own souls. For at bottom only God *is*. When the individual soul has merged in the Highest, only the Lord remains ! The drop of water has gone back to its nature ; it has become the ocean. To His devotees the Lord assumes any form, according to their

needs and according to their understanding. Do they worship Him as the Mother-Providence of the Universe, lo, even so does He appear unto them ! Do they worship Him as the Heavenly Father, verily, in that very manner does He come to them ! Do they worship Him as the Silent, Eternal Reality, dwelling within the secret places of the heart, aye, He appears to them therein as the Infinite Reality !

The tiny boats in which one must sit cross-legged on the floor, take the devotees by sunlight or by moonlight and at any time to the landing-ghats at Dakshineswar. Sometimes the boat drifts with the incoming tide. Sometimes the winds carry it thither when the sails are set. At other times, against the tides and winds, the boat speeds to Dakshineswar by the strong arms of the joyous boatmen. Otherwise, one takes a *garri* from the crowded bazaars of the big city, leaving behind him the tumultuous noise of multitudes of men, and approaches by the highway the peace of this sacred retreat.

There the Temple stands, a massive edifice of oriental design, the centre rising into a tower of splendour with strange, symbolic spires pointing to the sky. It is grey with age and a dignity surrounds it with an atmosphere akin to a Venerable Presence before which one finds peace. To the right and left rise two structures of lesser proportions, one a temple of Vishnu, while the other is a *Natya-mandir*. The dwelling-house of Rani Rashmoni stands in the midst of the groves of Dakshineswar. The enclosed courtyard surrounding the Temple is, of itself, of enormous proportions. Here the great assemblies of devotees gather. On the western side of this enclosure are the twelve shrines of Shiva, six to the one side and six to the other of the great arched, tower-like portico entrance leading into the courtyard. And flanking and fronting the Shiva shrines is the broad footpath which runs from the landing-ghat into numerous avenues and side retreats. One walks for an hour along the river's side and in the mazes of these thoroughfares.

The Kali-Temple of Dakshineswar is one of the largest in

India. Its gardens are admired by all who visit this celebrated place. They are not gardens so much as open spaces in a great grove, for Dakshineswar is a grove, grown wild in many places and filled with much romance in all its shaded retreats. For here some saint may have worshipped ; here another may have had a great vision ; here many disciples of Sri Ramakrishna have practised meditation and austerities. The whole place vibrates with a mystical and spiritual fire. At the back of the Temple compound is a pool, surrounded by an avenue of trees which skirt the square into which shape the pool is fashioned.

Dakshineswar is known nowadays more as the place where Sri Ramakrishna lived than because of its temples. Thousands make pilgrimage to the spot because of their love for him. Millions believe him to be an Avatara or an Incarnation of God. Many believe his personality to have been worked-up by the Divine Mother for the special purpose of giving forth a message of spirituality to a world grown old in a materialistic consciousness ; and, also, for the purpose of preserving Hinduism from a complete undermining by the ingrowth of the so-called modern spirit.

If the visiting pilgrims are watched, one sees them, after they have made their prostrations before Mother Kali, pass down the roadway that skirts the Ganges-side to a grand old tree, round which there is a broad seat raised in tiers for meditation purposes. Here, under the spreading branches, Sri Ramakrishna, and later on Noren, thought of God until He became a Realisation to them. The tree is called the "Panchavati," that is, a cluster of five kinds of trees grown together. Here and there such clusters of trees held as sacred are to be found in India. In the Garden of Dakshineswar, the "Panchavati" numbers a great banyan-tree among its group. After Sri Ramakrishna had finished his Sadhanas a large branch fell, covering that very spot on which he had sat in meditation and attained Illumination, as if to shelter it from all possible profanation. The seat of Sri Ramakrishna rose a tier or two higher than the general

resting-place. Only two others were able to concentrate their minds under that same tree, one an Advaita Vedantin, Tota Puri by name, the *guru* of Sri Ramakrishna in the Advaita Vedanta, and the other, he who became known as the Swami Vivekananda. Tradition has it that the tree is protected, as it were, by a *Bhairava*, or a powerful spirit, who prevents any one who is not pure from meditating there. Even Tota Puri and Noren experienced great difficulty, so it is said, in concentrating of their minds on Reality there. Some powerful force seemed bent on driving them forth. In the case of Tota Puri Sri Ramakrishna intervened, for he had become the *guru* of his own *guru* in teaching him the true spirit of the Advaita which knows no fear or hatred. In the instance of Noren, however, it was different. Finding that something opposed him in his desire to centre his mind upon God, he took a flaming brand from the meditation-fire before him and struck the ground with such violence and with such intensity of emotion that he swooned. When he emerged from that state, however, he found that he could meditate with ease. Sri Ramakrishna, when he heard of the incident, smiled knowingly.

A little distance from the *Panchavati* is another tree, a *Bilva*-tree, sacred to Shiva, which is now circumscribed by a seat. Buried underneath the seat of this tree, in the days of the saints, were five skulls, three of which were those of a monkey, a suicide and a notorious criminal. Skulls have often been objects upon which monks fixed their meditation, both in the East and in the West. In a particular form of worship in Hinduism, however, special skulls are selected for the purpose of focussing such a power of thought that the mind rises upon it, beyond all the horrors of life, into the fearlessness which is the soul's own essence. Sri Ramakrishna meditated here also ; so did Noren. Later, another man endeavoured to do that which the saints had done, and he became mad. He could not endure the forms which came in the course of the meditation upon the Terrible One, Who dances the Dance of Death and Destruction. There are other

meditations also, for example, that performed by monks in the burning-grounds where the destroying flames burn the body to ashes. Or, again, it may be that ten-timesterrible meditation when the monk, seated upon a body newly dead, meditates upon Reality, in the darkest night of the dark fortnight, in a lonely spot, in an effort to vanquish all the forces of death and all the horrors and bondages both of life and death. The monk meditates on Death. Then he knows the Truth.

These two trees are now venerated ; and under their branches a great peace reigns. Along the river's side one hears the murmur of the waters. Overhead is the canopy of trees, and through them at night the stars gleam in mysterious ways. And the mind recalls the poetry of that Hindu saying, "The stars are great souls. The effulgence is the light of their glorious meditation."

The silence and peace of God dwell at the Dakshineswar Temple-garden. The room is still to be seen there in which Sri Ramkrishna lived those long, long years. On the walls are pictures of various Hindu Incarnations and also of Jesus the Christ. The atmosphere is still there. The days are silent there. The nights dwell in peace there. And when the moon rises, one seems to see glorious forms that the day does not reveal. In the temple is the Divine Mother, above both the pleasant and the terrible aspects of life. The saint sees in Her an Ocean of Love which he calls the Mother, though the tumult of the surface be death and though across it blow the winds of the terrible. Terrible is life, terrible is joy to the saint. More real is death. More real, above all, is the Vision of the Mother, beyond both birth and death. That which is alone real is God. By the light of the moon one sees some devout monk telling his beads, or another plunged in meditation in a sequestered spot. One may hear, in the evening stillness, the echo of some holy song as it is carried by the breezes over the river from the tiny boats in which the singers chant their lays. On the opposite bank of the Ganges, a mile or so away to the south, is the Ramakrishna monastery.

XXXIV

AT THE TOUCH OF THE MASTER.

At that first meeting, when Noren met Sri Ramakrishna, more than two personalities were concerned. The complex life of India itself began to flow, as it were, in two definite streams of tendency,—the Old and the New. Of these there were many subordinate tributaries. Some had arisen in modern times, so far as the New was concerned, such as the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj and such other movements, while some had flowed from of Old, such as the orthodox faiths. But all these divergent and tributary currents were merging in those two great streams, as the history of the period attests. And when Sri Ramakrishna met Noren, these two, the Old and the New, found their confluence, and were thereafter to flow into an Historic Stream, as it were,—the Mighty Ganges of the Indian Future.

Sri Ramakrishna was the Heart of Old India with its spiritual perspective, with its asceticism and with its realisation. Noren, who became the Swami Vivekananda, had that personality in the process of development which was to be the Heart of New India with the ancient spiritual perspective heightened, widened and strengthened to include the modern learning without any danger to itself; and the asceticism of the future was to be made manifest in sacrifice for the service of others. Its realisations were to include social as well as religious ideals. From these two currents of influence was to spring Neo-Hinduism, the Faith of a Glorious To-morrow, in which all should be fulfilment and nothing denial.

From a personal point of view the meeting was likewise extraordinary. A devotee of Sri Ramakrishna had been the means. He had said to Noren, calling him by his pet name, as he was a relative of his, "Bileh, why do you go about here

and there, to the Brahmo Samaj and other places, in search of religion. If you have a real intention of practising religion, I advise you to go to Dakshineswar. Mere wandering about as you are doing at present will do you no good." And so Noren had come to the beautiful retreat of Sri Ramakrishna. To Sri Ramakrishna himself the meeting was as a lightning flash of memory and recognition. He treated Noren as if he had always known and loved him. In some strange way, unknown to himself and inexplicable, Noren felt drawn towards him. He did not know what to make of the matter. He could not understand the Master's sudden joy at seeing him. And then he was asked to sing; and he sang that song which reads,—

"O my mind let us go to our own abode.
In the foreign land of this world of change
Why roam uselessly in the garb of a foreigner!"

The song went on to the words,—

"And for support, keep this treasure
In the secret of the heart,—the treasure, purity!"

That was the song, but it acted like magic upon Sri Ramakrishna. He cried out with tears in his eyes and with overwhelming joy upon his face, "My boy! My boy! Lo! I have been anxiously waiting for you for years! At last you have come!" And then he passed into the ecstatic consciousness. And when he emerged from that state he said, "My boy, I was waiting for you all this time. Why did you make such a delay in coming! My lips are burnt by talking with worldly-minded people! Now, however, I shall soothe them by talking with you!"

There were others about Sri Ramakrishna, some old men, some middle-aged and some lads to the number of twenty or more of Noren's own age. They were believers in the holiness of this sage. Noren met these. Some he had already known; some he had not known before. Others he had heard of. This was a new world to him. He immediately settled it in his own mind that Sri Ramakrishna was a madman and that his followers were also mad and immersed

in superstition. In spite of this, however, Noren could not account for the strange blessedness that came over him as he sang the song. To Sri Ramakrishna, the song was as a divine flame, on hearing which he grew rigid in body, the while his soul soared aloft to God. This was strange to Noren. It was all strange,—the numbers of adoring devotees, the unaccountable religious ecstasy of the Master, the state of the bodily unconsciousness, the return of the soul of Sri Ramakrishna from ecstasy, the atmosphere of intense blessedness, the words of the Master, the uplifting of his own soul—all these were bewildering to Noren. He left the presence of Sri Ramakrishna, feeling as one who was just withdrawing from some sanctuary; and yet his mind thought, "It is strange; it is curiously strange!"

Referring to this the Swami Vivekananda used to tell his disciples and his *gurubhais*, "I thought at the time, 'What a madman is this! Is it a madman to whom Ramdada has brought me, after all! Reason tells me that he is mad, but the heart is attracted to him! Wonderful is this madman—wonderful is his attraction—wonderful is his love! I took him to be mad, but I was dumbfounded with admiration at the same time! This was a wonderful experience!'"

As he was leaving, he gave his promise to Sri Ramakrishna that he would come to Dakshineswar frequently. The Master entreated him to come. So he went at a later day in the company of some of his Brahmo friends. Again Sri Ramakrishna begged Noren to sing. He did so, and while the song was in progress, and the audience was stilled, and he himself, quite unconscious of his surroundings, sang in the full freedom of his soul, Sri Ramakrishna exclaimed, "Behold! See how the light of Saraswati, the Goddess of learning, beams out from him!" And those who heard him say this, looked upon Noren with wonder. It was strange that the Master should speak so; or rather, it was more strange that he should have seen such eminent spirituality in this boy. "Do you see a great light before falling asleep?" asked Sri Ramakrishna. Noren related what he had

experienced every night from his childhood, how the light came and how he would enter into it, and then fall fast asleep. The Master said eagerly, "Ah ! It is true. This one is a *Dhyāna-siddha*. His sleep is as the meditation upon God." *Dhyāna* is the state of intense meditation. A *siddha* is one in whom the powers of the spiritual insight are perfectly developed.

"How strange !" thought Noren. The boys who had come with him smiled at his puzzled manner as they left Dakshineswar on that day. But Noren was most serious. He remembered what the Maharshi Debendra Nath Tagore had said, "Boy, you have the Yogi's eyes." He pondered over it all. What did these two persons mean ! Was it true of him what these had spoken ! Or was the Master a mad-man and the Maharshi self-deluded !

Following upon his first visit, he had asked the devotee who had brought him to the Master, what manner of man Sri Ramakrishna was, and he was told, "He is a wonderful man. He is highly spiritual. There is not a trace of lust in him ; and he despises gold and looks upon all women as Mother. He is a true Yogi ; indeed, he is one who has *seen* God." And thus one finds Noren coming to this God-man in all the anguish of a soul in doubt, asking, "Sire, have you *seen* God ?" Already the answer is known. But he could not then solve the problem. His mind said, "He is a lunatic !" His heart said, "I am drawn to him ; and his love is wonderful !"

To be sure, the old man loved him. Such love Noren had never seen. Not even his own mother professed such love for him. How strange he was ! And yet the leaders of spiritual thought in India venerated him. Even the great Brahmo leaders, such as Keshub Chandra Sen, regarded him with an admiration equal to the reverence of deep discipleship. The great Vedantin thinkers, who held life to be a dream and the sense of "I" to be an illusion, spoke of him in awe.

Born in 1834 A. D. on the twentieth of February, and

of the highest caste, but in the utmost poverty, Sri Ramakrishna had from his boyhood, in the out-of-the-way village in which he was born, exhibited signs of the mystical consciousness. At eleven, as he told his disciples later, he had the Glorious Vision, when he saw everything as of the Glory of God. In his boyhood, after having seen a drama played once, he used to enact it in his boyish way, depicting the careers of the Saints and Divine Incarnations ; and the simple villagers stood amazed at the religious transports into which he passed. At eighteen he was made a temple-priest at Dakshineswar ; but as he worshipped, he confused the ritual in the depth of his religious meditation and devotion. He could no longer officiate. Mathoor, the son-in-law of Rani Rasmoni, the builder of the Temple, believed the young man to be a *Siddha* soul. So he was allowed to remain. A room was given to him and there he sat for days in meditation, forgetting to take food. Times were when great floods of anguish came over him because he had not seen the Mother, under which aspect he had conceived Brahman. He rolled on the ground in the intensity of his anguish. Then he would retreat again into his inner-self, losing all consciousness of outer things. When he returned to his normal condition, it would be with an untiring outburst of praise to God. Often the mystical state would leave him semiconscious. Then he frequently spoke, seemingly addressing presences higher than human. Often a joy unspeakable overshadowed him, and for hours he would sit in his room or wander on the Ganges side, chanting the names of God in a high pitch of blessedness. When the temple gongs resounded he was no longer of earth. He soared in spirit to the Mother. He placed himself in all manners of relationship to God, now as the servant, now as the lover, now as the child of the Most High. Again, he would attain the divine state of consciousness, when he saw God as all in all, beyond thought, beyond form, beyond personality, forgetting himself, and was conscious only of that Reality which is the Most High.

His powers were remarkable. With a touch, with a look,

with but a wish he made others conscious of what he was conscious. The thoughts of others he could see as one sees an object. By his will he could find the chief tendency, the leading purpose, the prevailing characteristic of any personality. The lads whom Noren came to know, and who later became his brother-monks in the Order of Sri Ramakrishna which he founded, were chosen by Sri Ramakrishna because he *knew* them. He had complete control over his own consciousness, so that whenever he desired, he could enter the condition of blessedness. A song, a word, the sight of one whom he loved, would often render him so conscious of another order of being that he became, as it were, unconscious to this plane of life.

His relations, hoping to thwart his religious career, influenced him to marry. He complied with their request knowing not what marriage meant, and thinking only that it was one of the injunctions of the Shâstras which had to be obeyed. In India, marriage is in the nature of a betrothal for a few years, because the wife is but a child. Yet the relatives believed that this marriage would turn his mind to worldly things. When grown up, his wife, Sarada Devi, hearing that her husband had gone mad, journeyed afoot for days with her relatives until she reached the Temple-garden in which he lived. He addressed her at sight as "Mother !" She understood from that very moment. And, thereafter, she joined him as his spiritual help-meet and disciple in the religious life. And he worshipped her with flowers and with lights as the Mother Incarnate.

When Noren met Sri Ramakrishna, the Master was, to use his own simile of what a religious teacher should be, the full-blown lotus of spirituality. And many were the bees that had come to him. But in his earlier years the Master had ascended the house-tops of his dwelling-place and cried out, weeping, "O Mother, where are my devotees ? Bring them to me !" And now they had come ; aye, and Noren, too, the most beloved, the chief of disciples. And all entered a world rich with revelation and intense with the burning fires of spirit-

ual illumination. And he initiated them into the ways of truth. He was to them the living flame of the divine life. As goodness is embodied, so even is divinity embodied ; and when the clouds of worldly life were dispersed by much thinking upon God, or when the mind was lifted from earthly things on the wings of ecstatic song, the devotees and the Master grew one in the rhapsodies of the Beatific Vision. And the garden of Dakshineswar became even as the heaven of Brahmā. And they sang and they danced in overwhelming joy in the name of the Lord ; and they took the dust of the ground on which they stood. It had become holy ; for upon it the names of the Lord had been taken with tremendous ecstasy of soul.

And yet Noren stood somewhat aloof. He did not quite understand all this. The intellectual self doubted, while the mystical self rejoiced in this new world in which he found himself. He thought, "All this is nonsense. Some day the old man will come to know that his Kali is a myth ; and then he will transcend his present consciousness. He will get to a higher state of insight." And yet, he was caught up in the ecstasy of those moments with the Master. Was it because he loved song for the sake of song ? For sometimes it was his custom to sing and sing the whole day long, so lost in the rapture of it that he would even forget to eat.

It came to pass that, when Noren visited the Temple-grounds and grove of Dakshineswar for the third time and had sung a song before the Master, an event took place which touched the very foundation of his personality. When he had finished his singing, a great seriousness came over the face of the Master. The other disciples wondered what was to come. The Master was looking fixedly at Noren. He arose ; and then taking him quite apart into the more distant retreats of the Temple-gardens he confided to him a momentous truth. He said, "Behold in you is Shiva ! And in me is the Sakti ! And these two are One !" Shiva is the positive divine Self, positive in His knowledge which is blessedness. And Kali the Mother, the Sakti, is the feminine divine Self,

positive in Her dance of destruction which makes the illusion of life. But to Her devotee She gives the consciousness of Reality.

Noren smiled. Certainly this was downright madness, if ever there was madness. He said nothing ; but he pursued a train of thought the contents of which were that the spiritual experiences of his Master were in the nature of an epileptic fit and that his brain was deranged. But the Master likewise pursued a train of thought. He thought that the time had already come to modify the great scepticism of the disciple whom he loved the most of all from the very first moment of seeing him. And he decided on a certain course.

They returned to the living-room of Sri Ramakrishna where he was wont to see his disciples. For a time there was song and conversation. Then, as the evening came on, an awesome moment of tremendous import descended upon the group of devotees. A terrible stillness seemed to come over their hearts. Sri Ramakrishna was bordering on the consciousness of supreme insight. In that state he came down from his seat and, walking across the room came to Noren who was sitting close at hand and placed his right hand upon the boy's heart and then, drawing himself up, put his foot upon the shoulder of the boy, as if to break his body-consciousness which is the nest of dreams.

And Noren ! Noren !—for him the room, the verandahs, the Temple, the garden of Dakshineswar, the faces and forms of the devotees and of the Master seemed all of a sudden to fade out. He felt himself sinking as if in a deep faint. At the touch of the Master, his consciousness was dissolving. And in that state he cried out in anguished dismay, "O ! What is happening ! O what are you doing to me ! I have a father and a mother at home !" And then, having uttered these words, he fell into unconsciousness. Thus he remained for a short time until the Master again touched his heart, and then slowly he came back to consciousness. When he was himself again he felt a certain freshness of the body and a certain invigoration of the mind, as if he had awakened from deep

slumber. But so far as to what were the contents of his consciousness during the time of the trance he could not recall. It was not his *karma* or fate as yet to have the conscious mind thus impressed. It was perhaps the will of the Master that his disciple should not be aware of the highest state so soon. He was not as yet prepared for it ; otherwise the dissolution of consciousness he experienced would not have terrified him. Then, too, he would have remembered. It was because Sri Ramakrishna desired to prove to him by the convincing force of actual personal experience that his was a spiritual power and a spiritual consciousness, that he put Noren into that condition of *Samādhi*. And so intensely genuine were his Samādhis that he not only lost his own personality in an overwhelming ecstasy therein, but could also make another become possessed of them. However it might have been, Sri Ramakrishna had, in that moment possessed himself of the personality of Noren. He had turned the subconscious currents of Noren's tendency, by force as it were, into the superconscious channel. The conscious mind would waver for the time. That was well. It should be so ; it would have to work out its own possibilities in the direction of the perception of reality.

Later on, when Noren developed spiritually and grew beyond the region of intellectual doubt, and when he came to understand his Master and practise a series of ascetic exercises which were in the nature of a training of the conscious mind, he himself reached the highest plane of consciousness. He became possessed of the faculty of dissolving or intensifying his states of mind and fixing the entire attention and consciousness upon any ideal or object desired. And then the experience of trance was not that of a sinking condition while entering into it, nor was it a complete forgetfulness of what had transpired. It was a joyous expansion beyond the consciousness of the body ; it was a sensing of Unlimited Beatitude beyond. And the conscious mind, that drop in the deep ocean of the soul, was permeated with insight and illumination. It rejoiced in that state ; and though he ex-

perienced the highest *Samādhi* only thrice or so in his life, and lastly at the moment of death, he had numerous approximations to it. All of them bore witness to the fact that Sri Ramakrishna was not a madman, but verily, a sane man among the myriad lunatics of the world, who dwell in the asylum of selfishness and desire, and who are bound down in the prison-house of lust and gold. Noren realised that Sri Ramakrishna was a man who could turn his own soul from human consciousness into the shoreless sea of the consciousness of God, *at will*.

But this awareness on his part with regard to the Master came only at a later time. Here, he had an inkling of the matter. He was terrified, but where he was terrified to go there Sri Ramakrishna rejoiced to be, for it was passing through the dwindling darkness of personality into the Effulgence of God. Yes, the illuminated consciousness is, the light on the path. But from that time when the Master touched the heart of his disciple he owned and possessed him. It was a possession, however, which meant the highest freedom for Noren's own soul. And though the conscious mind would hesitate for a time and go through developing experiences, the Soul of him had been awakened fully and forever through the agency of his Master.

XXXV

THE DISCIPLE'S MEDITATION.

Who is he that moves with such heedless steps along the river's side at Dakshineswar, clapping his hands and crying aloud the name of God? He looks as one bereft of his senses, and a joy hovers over him as incense about a shrine. Evening has glided along into the first shadows of the night, and there is peace in the gardens. In the distance the sounds of bells and drums and songs pour forth from the temples where Kali the Mother and Vishnu are being worshipped. It is Sri Ramakrishna, mad with the name of the Mother, who wanders on the Ganges' bank, shrouded in the oncoming night. Louder and louder becomes the chanting of the songs. Lights are being waved in the temples before the images. Bells are ringing, and above the joyous sound, the sacred chant is heard as the main theme in the chorus of worship.

Near the Panchavati tree, in the shadows thrown by the moon-light, stands a lad of twenty years with mixed feelings stirring the depths of his soul. Yearning and doubt are shadowed on his face. The music of the temples has aroused the devotional self within him, but his intellect follows the joyous Sri Ramakrishna in an effort at analysis. "Who is this man? Who is this man?" It is Noren who asks himself this question. He had heard some people speak of Sri Ramakrishna as an Incarnation of God. Others referred to him as a great sage. He had heard Keshub Chandra Sen speak of him with bated breath. His English professor while explaining the condition of *trance* described by Wordsworth in his poem, "The Excursion," had spoken of Sri Ramakrishna as a living instance of one who often entered into this superconscious state. "A wonderful man! A God-Man!" said Noren to himself. "A madman!" he thought with the next breath. "And yet what wonderful power he

must have to have thrown me at will into the state of that trance which I had deemed madness in him !"

Meanwhile Sri Ramakrishna had stopped his walking. He stood still, tense, and as Noren could see by the moonlight, he was in that superconscious state, known in India as Samadhi and in the West as ecstasy. A few moments later and he was approaching the Temple and found himself following Sri Ramakrishna. They entered it ; and Noren seemed to hear the voice of Sri Ramakrishna rise into a louder glory in the chanting of the Mother's Name ; for the voice of the Master was musical and strong. Some said, that when they approached his dwelling-room at Dakshineswar they heard, as it were, a chorus of voices singing. But when they came, it was only he who was singing.

Leaving the temple Noren returned to the meditation-seat at *Panchavati*, and entered a reverie of thought. He reviewed, as he knew it, the life of the Master. And his meditation was of the following nature :

"Yes, the father and the mother of this man were venerated as living saints by the simple villagers. He was named Gadadhar by his parents, as he was born after they had had a dream in which the Lord Vishnu appeared before them and said that He would be born as their son. He was given the name of Ramakrishna by his *guru*, Tota Puri, at the time of his initiation into *sannyasa* by him." Rama and Krishna are the names of the two most beloved and greatest Incarnations of the Lord. He was known as Ramakrishna ; but the pet name of his childhood was Gadai.

Noren mused in thought over the youth of Sri Ramakrishna : "He had learned little of this world's knowledge. True, he had received some lessons in reading and writing, but they were only elementary. He grew up amidst the simplicities of a village, the cows, the fields and the simple village life, yet he manifested even in his youth a peculiar tendency to the religious consciousness." Noren recalled many incidents in the life of the Master as a boy, sweet incidents to the memory, and dear to the heart. And a

wave of love sprang up in his soul for the hero of his thought.

"Yes," said Noren to himself. "Each morning the boy bathed and then worshipped the Lord, first as Brahman, and then as Rama, the great King-Incarnation, to whom he was especially attached. How often he would gather the village-lads about him and play with them the life-histories of great Incarnations !" And Noren thought, "O to have been of that group !" Then he continued in his meditation, "How the villagers were amazed at him, as he took these parts ! How the tears of joy would flow down their cheeks and they would laugh and cry at the same moment from sheer ecstasy ! What transports of blessedness those were ! The people gathered round just to hear him sing. And then Sadhus and learned pundits would often visit the village. He would serve them. Sometimes there was little food. They were poor,—the parents of Sri Ramakrishna. But be that as it may, be there ever so little food at home, that must be given to the guest." For such is the custom amongst the Hindus. Though he himself starve, the Hindu must feed the guest, for a guest is the messenger of God.

When the temple service was over, Sri Ramakrishna came out of the house of the Mother. Walking along the roadway, he saw someone seated on the meditation-seat. He came closer to discover who this might be. It was Noren ! Joy was with Sri Ramakrishna instantaneously. But he would not disturb the boy, who was too deeply immersed in thought to notice him. So he stood silent and in rapture, biding the time of Noren's coming forth from that state.

And Noren's mind wandered on and on in the deep channel of the intensity of his thought : "Sri Ramakrishna's father passed away. The sons came to Calcutta. About this time the Temple of Kali the Mother at Dakshineswar was completed, and his elder brother was appointed as temple-priest, with Sri Ramakrishna as his assistant. Afterwards he took the place of his brother. And then came the great

change in that young life. The boy became the devotee ; the devotee became the ascetic ; the ascetic became the saint ; the saint became the man of realisation. The man of realisation became the prophet ; the prophet became merged in the Divine Nature which was God." And Noren bowed his head as if in deep worship. Sri Ramakrishna was in deep meditation himself standing in ecstasy.

And Noren said in his thought, "What a wonder was his devotion ! Did he endeavour to worship the Mother, lo, his mind would be lost at the first moment of contemplating Her greatness. His relatives grew frightened. Would he go mad ? So they married him. But marriage was only an incident. Not for a moment did it distract him. On the contrary he had forgotten that he had ever married and had a wife. He plunged into deeper and deeper austerities, for he had begun to practise austerities ; in fact, the natural state of his devotion was, of itself, an enormous strain on his person. To an ordinary individual his devotion would have been the ideal to be realised after years, if not after repeated lifetimes, of practice.

"He could not serve in the Temple. His very devotion incapacitated him. So he went to the Ganges side one evening and his heart was in anguish at the thought of not having *seen* his mother. The separation he felt was terrible. As he was standing there, he yearned to practise religious *sādhanās* in the solitude of the Panchavati grove, and wished that he could build a tiny hut there for meditation. Even as he thought this, he saw the tide bring up to his very feet the materials wherewith to build a hut for himself ! And so he gathered the wood and built a hut in that secluded spot of the Temple-grounds. Here he was lost to the outside world. Here he fasted and prayed. For six months he lived in a condition of constant Samādhi. Food was forced into his mouth by his loving nephew and constant attendant, Hriday. The contents of his mind were discernible only in certain agonised prayers to the Mother ; and at other times he would speak words of overwhelming joy, showing that his soul was

in communion with the ideal. His countenance was radiant even in that asceticism. His hair had grown until it was matted. His face was thin and drawn, and yet a wonderful presence lingered about him. His eyes shone like fire. Many wandering monks came to see him. They paid their homage to him and then journeyed onwards, considering themselves blessed.

"And at this time a terrible fever took possession of him. None could diagnose it. The condition of his body became dangerous. Before his asceticism his form was robust. His face was strikingly handsome. But now the body had become broken; the face had become emaciated until it was painful to look upon. But yet there was divinity in his eyes." The meditation of Noren ceased for a moment. He sighed deeply. Tears of commiseration and of ecstasy fell from his eyes. And he continued,—

"O wonder of wonders! At this critical period came a Bráhmāni Sannyāsini, or wandering nun. Her garments were red in colour, and she was beautiful to look upon. But she had given up all ideas of beauty and of love. There was an austerity about her; and a blessedness came forth from her person as a perfume. She saw the saint. She understood his condition, and she constituted herself his attendant under the direction of Mathoor Babu, the son-in-law of Rani Rasmoni. *Bráhmāni*, the name by which she was known, told them who thought Sri Ramakrishna mad, that the malady from which the saint was suffering was the great love of God which possessed him. It was so intense that it had brought on that peculiar form of fever. Like an elephant which tramples down a hut which is too small for its body, the fire of the divine consciousness was proving too strong in its burning power. It was destroying the body. She gave him some herbs which are prescribed in the sacred writings for such who are thus afflicted. Gradually he regained his consciousness of sense. And it was pitiful to behold his manner on recovery. He had been separated, so he felt, from his Realisation. What mattered the condition of the body? The soul

was in ecstasy. But the nun consoled him saying that the Mother would be always with him, and proved to him and others by quoting appropriate verses from the sacred Scriptures that similar states of ecstasy had been manifested only in Râdha and in Chaitanya, the greatest embodiments of the madness of Divine Love. She gave him instruction in her own religious realisation, which was a special form in the worship of the Mother. Having fulfilled her mission, she departed."

All this time Sri Ramakrishna kept his mind fixed on Noren who sat there, deep in meditation. He did not disturb him. He waited patiently. The mind of Noren went on, taking in the remaining features of that glorious life, until that time when he himself had found it.

"When Brâhmani had departed, Sri Ramakrishna was as much as ever given up to tremendous religious intensity and practice. He initiated his consciousness into the glorious awareness of many forms of religious conception and ideals. Then Tota Puri came. Now Sri Ramakrishna was to pass into the highest state, that state of which the Scriptures say, 'If one remains in it continuously for twenty-one days, the body will fall into death and the soul forever remain in the utmost beatitude and in the essence of God.' Tota Puri was *Nyângtâ*, the Naked One, as Sri Ramakrishna spoke of him. He was a wanderer on the face of the earth, believing that the universe itself was a dream. Rain or shine was alike to him. The sky was his roof; the grass his bed; his food what chance might bring. He came to Sri Ramakrishna, a Voice having told him, 'Go down to Bengal. There is work for you. You will help a certain soul.' And, following that bidding, he had arrived at Dakshineswar. He admired Sri Ramakrishna. And, though he had remained no longer than three days at a time at any place in all his monastic life, he took up his abode at Dakshineswar for many months, teaching and initiating his self-chosen disciple into the consciousness of the highest Vedanta philosophy. It had taken him forty years to master the Advaita consciousness. Sri Rama-

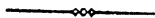
krishna, having received the consent of the Mother to be taught this highest wisdom, gained this same consciousness in three days of effort, aye, in three days after his taking initiation from his teacher ! Tota Puri could not account for this and doubted his own senses. Believing Sri Ramakrishna to be feigning the highest or the Nirvikalpa Samādhi, he beat him severely to test its truth. It was to no purpose, however.

“Sri Ramakrishna continued in that condition, emerging there from only after the experience had been consummated in sublimest vision. Then the teacher in turn became the disciple. Tota Puri in course of time was initiated into the awareness of the Personal aspect of Divinity in which he had previously no faith. Many miraculous happenings are told of the depth and the intensity of Sri Ramakrishna’s realisation at this time. Tota Puri was astounded. The greatest *gurus*, or teachers, of the various religious sects, Mohammedan and Hindu alike, came to the Master and departed, acknowledging him to be their Ideal. Yes, he had become a Mohammedan to realise Allah ; and later on, he became a Christian to realise Christ. Tota Puri, having fulfilled his mission and recognising Sri Ramakrishna to be the greatest spiritual genius of the age, departed. Then there were years of silent meditation and realisation during which the lotus of the soul of Sri Ramakrishna was on the full way to ripe blossoming. Then the bees came. Gauri Pandit, Padmalochan, Vaishnavacharan, Sasadhar Tarkachuramani and a host of other great Pandits and Sādhakas came. Keshub Chandra Sen and Pratap Chandra Mozoomdar came ; Bijoy Krishna Goswami and Swami Dayananda Saraswati came ; the great Nag Mahashaya came ; Christians came ; Mohammedans came ; Sikhs came ; and Hindus, by the hundreds upon hundreds. Great poets and thinkers came ; eminent preachers and theologians came ; professors and leaders of public opinion came. Men and women came ; the rich and the poor came. Disciples came.” And last of all Noren himself came, he and that group of young men of his own age who were to become the monks of the Order of Ramakrishna.

Noren felt a touch upon his hands, folded as they were one upon the other in the way of meditation. His thought had become deep, intense. It was therefore with a start that he turned. There stood Sri Ramakrishna, smiling tenderly upon him. Beatitude was in his eyes. A divine light shone upon his face. And Noren felt strangely happy and wonderfully at peace. Yes, here was this spiritual man whose love for him was so pure, so deep, so intense. He fell at his feet. Sri Ramakrishna raised him up. Then the two were alone in the night. All sound was hushed save the lapping of the waters of the near-by Ganges as they touched the shore of Dakshineswar. The stars were above. It was the deep Indian night. A holy presence seemed cast over the face of the earth, and over the Dakshineswar Temple-garden ; and in the dwelling-room of the Master several devotees were fast asleep.

Sri Ramakrishna said, "Come, Noren !" And the two went off into the distance and the shadows of the trees, until they reached that other tree of meditation, under which Sri Ramakrishna had performed, in former times, terrible Sādhana's. There the two sat in meditation. And the Master initiated Noren into the deep ways of wisdom, and into the methods of following certain of the more difficult paths of ascetic practice by which all the forms of fear and death and all restlessness and turbulence of mind are vanquished.

Thereafter many were the times when the Master and the disciple were alone and in the silence, pondering upon life and what lies beyond its reach, realising the Light of the Soul amidst the darkness of the world.



XXXVI

AS OTHERS SAW THE MASTER.

That the most awakened men of the Brahmo Samaj were great admirers of the Man of Dakshineswar is a wonderful tribute to his greatness, for the Brahmo Samaj had, to all appearances, no relationship with the orthodoxy of Hinduism. It was however the overwhelming realisation of Sri Ramakrishna which made them bow their heads at his feet. Next to Keshub Chandra Sen, no man in the circle of the Brahmo Samaj was as learned and as prominent as the famous Protap Chandra Mazoomdar. What he says, though somewhat lengthy, merits full repetition, because of the luminous vision it embodies. The following extract reads from the Theistic Quarterly Review, October, 1879 :—

“My mind is still floating in the luminous atmosphere which that wonderful man diffuses around him whenever and wherever he goes. My mind is not yet disenchanted of the mysterious and indefinable pathos which he pours into it whenever he meets me. What is there in common between him and me ? I, a Europeanised, civilised, self-centred, semi-sceptical so-called educated reasoner, and he a poor, illiterate, unpolished, half-idolatrous, friendless Hindu devotee ? Why should I sit long hours to attend to him, I who have listened to Disraeli and Fawcett, Stanley and Max Muller, and a whole host of European scholars and divines ? I who am an ardent disciple and follower of Christ, a friend and admirer of liberal-minded Christian missionaries and preachers, a devoted adherent and worker of the rationalistic Brahmo-Samaj—why should I be spell-bound to hear him ? And it is not I only, but dozens like me who do the same. He has been interviewed and examined by many ; crowds pour in to visit and talk with him. Some of our clever intellectual fools have found nothing in him, some of the contemptuous

Christian missionaries would call him an impostor, or a self-deluded enthusiast. I have weighed their objections well, and what I write now I write deliberately.

"The Hindu saint is a man under forty. He is a Brāhman by caste, he is well-formed in body naturally, but the dreadful austerities through which his character has developed appear to have disordered his system. Yet, in the midst of this emaciation, his face retains a fullness, a child-like tenderness, a profound visible humbleness, an unspeakable sweetness of expression and a smile that I have seen on no other face that I can remember. A Hindu saint is always particular about his externals. He wears the *gerrua* cloth, eats according to strict forms, refuses to have intercourse with men, and is a rigid observer of caste. He is always proud and professes secret wisdom. He is always *guruji*, a universal counsellor and a dispenser of charms. This man is singularly devoid of such claims. His dress and diet do not differ from those of other men except in the general negligence he shows towards both, and as to caste, he openly breaks it every day. He most vehemently repudiates the title of *guru*, or teacher, he shows impatient displeasure at any exceptional honour which people try to pay to him, and emphatically disclaims the knowledge of secrets and mysteries. He protests against being lionized, and openly shows his strong dislike to be visited and praised by the curious. The society of the worldly-minded and carnally-inclined he carefully shuns. He has nothing extraordinary about him. His religion is his only recommendation. And what is his religion? It is orthodox Hinduism, but, Hinduism of a strange type. Ramakrishna Paramahansa (for that is the name of this saint) is the worshipper of no particular Hindu god. He is not a Shaiva, he is not a Shakta, he is not a Vaishnava, he is not a Vedantist. Yet he is *all these*. He worships Shiva, he worships Kali, he worships Rama, he worships Krishna, and is a confirmed advocate of Vedanta doctrines. He accepts all the doctrines, all the embodiments, usages, and devotional practices of every religious cult. Each in turn is

infallible to him. He is an idolater, yet is a faithful and most devoted meditator of the perfections of the one formless, infinite Deity whom he terms "*Akhanda Sachchidananda*" (Indivisible Existence-Knowledge-Bliss). His religion, unlike the religion of ordinary Hindu *sadhus*, does not mean too much dogma, or controversial proficiency, or the outward worship with flowers and sandal-wood, incense and offering. His religion means ecstasy, his worship means transcendental insight, his whole nature burns day and night with the permanent fire and fever of a strange faith and feeling. His conversation is a ceaseless breaking forth of this inward fire and lasts long hours. While his interlocutors are weary, he, though outwardly feeble, is as fresh as ever. He merges into rapturous ecstasy and outward unconsciousness often during the day, oftenest in conversation when he speaks of his favourite spiritual experiences, or hears any striking response to them. But how is it possible that he has such a fervent regard for all the Hindu deities together? What is the secret of his singular eclecticism? To him each of these deities is a force, an incarnated principle tending to reveal the supreme relation of the soul to that eternal and formless Being who is unchangeable in His blessedness and the Light of Wisdom.

"Take for instance Shiva. The saint views and realises Shiva as the incarnation of contemplativeness and Yoga. Forgetful of all worldly care and concern, merged and absorbed in *Samadhi*, in the meditation of the ineffable perfections of the supreme *Brahman*, insensible to pain and privation, toil and loneliness, ever joyful in the blessedness of Divine communion, calm, silent, serene, immovable like the Himalayas where his abode is, Mahadeva is the ideal of all contemplative and self-absorbed men. The venomous serpents of evil and worldliness coil around his beatified form but cannot hurt him. The presence of death surrounds him in various forms of dread and danger, but cannot daunt him. Shiva takes upon himself the burdens and cares of all the world, and swallows the deadliest poison to confer immor-

talities upon others. Shiva renounces all wealth and enjoyment for the benefit of others, makes his faithful wife the companion of his austerities and solitude, and takes the ashes and the tiger-skin as his only ornaments. Shiva is the god of the Yogis. And this good man, while expatiating on the attributes of Shiva, would be immersed in the sublimity of his ideal, and become entranced, and remain unconscious for a long time.

"Then, perhaps, he would talk of Krishna whom he realises as the incarnation of love. 'Behold,' he says, 'the countenance of Krishna as represented popularly. Does it resemble a man's face, or a woman's? Is there a shadow of sensuality in it; is there a hair of masculine coarseness? It is a tender female face that Krishna has; in it is the fullness of boyish delicacy and girlish grace. By his affectionateness, many-sided and multiform, he won the hearts of men and women to the religion of *Bhakti* (Devotion).' That Divine love can take the form of every sanctified human relation is the great mission of Krishna to prove. As a loving child monopolising all the fondness of the hearts of aged parents; as a loving companion and friend attracting the profoundest loyalty and affection of men and brethren; as an admired and adored master, the sweetness and tenderness of whose teaching and whose affectionate persuasions converted girls and women to the self-consecration of a heartfelt piety, Krishna, the beauty and depth of whose character remain still beyond the reach of men's appreciation, introduced the religion of love into Hindustan. Then the good man would say how for long years he dressed himself as a cowherd, or a milkmaid, to be able to realise the experiences of that form of piety in which the human soul was like a faithful wife, and a loyal friend to the loving Spirit who is our Lord and only friend. Krishna is the incarnation of *Bhakti*. Then in the intensity of that burning love of God which is in his simple heart, the devotee's form and features suddenly grow stiff and motionless, unconsciousness overtakes him, his eyes lose their sight, and tears trickle down his fixed, pale, but smiling

face. There is a transcendent sense and meaning in that unconsciousness. What he perceives and enjoys in his soul when he has lost all outward perception who can say? Who will fathom the depth of that insensibility which the love of God produces? But that he sees something, hears, and enjoys when he is dead to all the outward world there is no doubt. If not, why should he, in the midst of that unconsciousness, burst into floods of tears and break out into prayers, songs and utterances, the force and pathos of which pierce through the hardest heart, and bring tears to eyes that never before wept under the influence of religion?

"Anon he would begin to talk of Kali, whom he addresses as his mother. She is the incarnation of the *Shakti*, or power of God as displayed in the character and influence of woman. Kali is the female principle in the nature of the Deity. She tyrannises over all tyrants. She brings down her husband low upon the ground, and places her foot upon his bosom. She charms and conquers all beings. Yet she is the mother of creation. Her tremendous power is a guarantee that she can save and protect her children, those that come to her as their mother, and ask the shelter of her feet. Her motherly solicitude excites the tenderest filial affection in the hearts of her devotees, and the inspiration of Ramprosad Sen which expressed itself in the most wonderful songs of filial piety ever sung, bears strange testimony to the reality and effectiveness of the worship of Kali. The adoration of *Shakti* (which literally means Force) is, according to our saint, a child-like, whole-souled, rapturous self-consecration to the motherhood of God as represented by the power and influence of woman. Woman, therefore, has long been renounced by our friend in every material and carnal relation. He has a wife but has never associated with her. Woman, he says, is unconquerable by man except by him who looks up to her as a son. Woman fascinates and keeps the whole world from the love of God. The highest and holiest saints have been brought back to carnality and sin by the nameless power of woman. The absolute conquest of lust has been his lifelong

ambition. For long years, therefore, he says, he made the utmost efforts to be delivered from the influence of woman. His heart-rending supplications and prayers for such deliverance, sometimes uttered aloud in his retreat on the river-side, brought crowds of people who bitterly cried when he cried, and could not help blessing him and wishing him success with their whole hearts.

"He has successfully escaped the evil of carnality which he dreaded. His Mother to whom he prayed, that is the goddess Kali, made him recognise every woman as her incarnation, so that he now honours each member of the other sex as his mother. He bows his head to the ground before women, and before little girls ; he has insisted upon worshipping not a few of them as a son might worship his mother. The purity of his thoughts and relations towards women is most unique and instructive. It is the opposite of the European idea. It is an attitude essentially, traditionally, gloriously national. Yes, a Hindu *can* honour woman.

"My father,' says the Paramahansa, 'was a worshipper of Rama. I, too, have accepted the Ramayat covenant. When I think of the piety of my father, the flowers with which he used to worship his favourite god bloom again in my heart and fill it with Divine fragrance.' Rama, the truthful and dutiful son, the good and faithful husband, the just and fatherly king, the staunch and affectionate friend, is regarded by him with the love and profound loyalty of a devoted servant. As a master the privilege of whose service is sufficient reward to the favoured, faithful servant, as a master in whose dear and matchless service the laying down of life is a delightful duty, as a master who has wholly enslaved the body and soul of his adoring slave, the contemplation of whose holy and glorious worth transcends every thought of remuneration and return, is Rama viewed by Ramakrishna. Hanuman, the renowned follower of Rama, is to him a model of a faithful servitor, a being who was devoted to his master's cause, inspired by such unworldly love and honour, such superhuman faithfulness as scorned alike death and danger, or hope of reward.

So the other sin which he spent his life to be free from, is the love of money. The sight of money fills him with strange dread. His avoidance of women and wealth is the whole secret of his matchless moral character. For a long time he practised a singular discipline. He took in one hand a piece of gold and in the other a lump of earth. He would then look at both, repeatedly calling the gold *earth*, and the earth *gold*, and then shuffling the contents of one hand into the other, he would keep up the process until he lost all sense of the difference between the gold and the earth. His ideal of service is absolute unworldliness and freedom from the desire of gain. He loves and serves Rama because Rama is the best and most loving master. The service of the true saint is the service of the purest affection and most unselfish loyalty. Some of the songs he sings expressive of this touching devotedness are exceedingly pathetic, and show how very negligent we often are.

"Nor is this reverence confined within Hinduism. For long days he subjected himself to various disciplines to realise the Mahammedan idea of an all-powerful Allah. He let his beard grow, he fed himself on Moslem diet, he continually repeated sentences from the Koran. His reverence for Christ is deep and genuine. He bows his head at the name of Jesus, honours the doctrine of his sonship, and we believe he once or twice attended Christian places of worship. These ideas at all events show the catholic religious culture of this great Hindu saint.

Each form of worship that we have tried to indicate above is to the Paramahansa a living and most enthusiastic principle of personal religion, and the accounts of discipline and exercise through which he has arrived at his present state of devotional eclecticism are most wonderful, although they cannot be published. He never writes anything, seldom argues, he never attempts to instruct, he is continually pouring out his soul in a rhapsody of spiritual utterances, he sings wonderfully, and makes observations of singular wisdom. He unconsciously throws a flood of marvellous

light upon the obscurest passages of the Pauranic Shastras, and brings out the fundamental principles of the popular Hindu faith with a philosophical clearness which strangely contrasts itself with his simple and illiterate life. These incarnations, he says, are but the forces (*Shakti*) and dispensations (*Lila*) of the eternally wise and blessed *Akhanda Sachchidananda* who never can be changed or formulated, who is one endless and everlasting ocean of light, truth and joy.

"If all his utterances could be recorded they would form a volume of strange and wonderful wisdom. If all his observations on men and things could be reproduced, people might think that the days of prophecy, of primeval, unlearned wisdom had returned. But it is most difficult to render his sayings in English.

"A living evidence of the depth and sweetness of Hindu religion is this good and holy man. He has wholly controlled his flesh. It is full of soul, full of the reality of religion, full of joy, full of blessed purity. As a *Siddha* Hindu ascetic he is a witness of the falsehood and emptiness of the world. His witness appeals to the profoundest heart of every Hindu. He has no other thought, no other occupation, no other relation, no other friend in his humble life than his God. That God is more than sufficient for him. His spotless holiness, his deep unspeakable blessedness, his unstudied, endless wisdom, his child-like peacefulness and affection towards all men, his consuming, all-absorbing love for God are his only reward. And may he long continue to enjoy that reward ! Our own ideal of religious life is different, but so long as he is spared to us, gladly shall we sit at his feet to learn from him the sublime precepts of purity, unworldliness, spirituality and inebriation in the love of God."

Quoting from *The Life of Keshub Chandra Sen*, published in 1887 by this same great writer, one reads,—"*In the Paramahansa's teaching there was another remarkable characteristic. This sweet-souled devotee has gathered the essential conceptions of Hindu Polytheism into an original structure of eclectic*

spirituality. This strange eclecticism suggested to Keshub's appreciative mind the thought of broadening the spiritual structure of his (Keshub's) own movement. The national conception of the Divine attributes spontaneously recommended themselves as beautiful and true and also as the surest means of making his faith intelligible and acceptable to the land. Of course, he kept the simple universal basis of Theism intact. But from a theistic point of view he gave the most brilliant expositions of the teachings of mythology. These reformed expositions have been utilised by orthodox champions to bring about a reaction on behalf of popular idolatry. The philosophy of the whole question was summarised by him (Keshub) in the *Sunday Mirror* thus,—‘ * * Hindu idolatry is nothing but the worship of a divine attribute materialised. If the material shape is given up, what remains is a beautiful allegory or picture of Heaven's dispensation. The Theist rejects the image, but he cannot dispense with the spirit of which the image is the form. The revival of the spirit, the destruction of the form, is the work of the New Dispensation. * * * Never were we so much struck with the divinity of the eclectic method as when we explored the gloomy regions of mythological India. * * * We have found out that every idol worshipped by the Hindu represents an attribute of God, and that each attribute is called by a peculiar name. The believer in the New Dispensation is required to worship God as the possessor of all those attributes represented by the Hindu as innumerable as 330 millions. To believe in an undivided deity, without reference to the aspects of his nature, is to believe in an abstract God, and it would lead us to practical rationalism and infidelity. If we are to worship Him in all His manifestations we shall name one attribute Lakshmi, another Sarasvati, another Mahadev &c., * * * *’

It would be well to quote still two other authorities of the Brahmo Samaj concerning the relationship of Sri Ramakrishna to Keshub Chandra Sen and the influences which the Master exercised over him.

"It was from the example of the Paramahansa's life that the idea of the Motherhood of God arose in the Brahmo Samaj. It was from him in particular that our Acharya (Keshub Chandra Sen) got the idea of invoking God with the sweet name of "Mother" after the simplicity of a child and of praying to Him and of beseeching Him for every indulgence as a child. The Brahmo religion was a religion of knowledge and dry disputations before. The shadow of Paramahansa's life falling on it made the Brahmo religion more agreeable by removing its dry or arid features."—*Translated from the Life and Teachings of Paramahansa Ramakrishna, contributed by Babu Girish Chandra Sen, a missionary of the New Dispensation Church, to the Dharmatatwa of 1st. Ashwin 1809 Saka, p. 195.*

"Through an exchange of the religious feelings of these two high-souled persons the Brahmo Samaj has advanced much in the region of Devotion. **** The child-like nature, at once simple and sweet, of the Paramahansa coloured Keshub's Yoga, his renunciation, his morality, his devotion, and his spotless conception of religion. The charming play of Devotion and the idea of God's Motherhood now displayed in the Brahmo Samaj are principally derived from Paramahansa Ramakrishna. **** That the worship of God as Mother, and adorations and prayers in those homely common words in which Keshub was seen to indulge in his later days, were due to the high-souled Paramahansa is known to many."—*Translated from the Life of Keshub Chandra Sen pp. 132 and 133, first Edition by Chiranjib Sarma.*

These excerpts from the writings of the foremost of Brahmo writers and authorities have been quoted freely, for they reveal the Master as others saw him.



XXXVII

THE SON OF HIS MOTHER.

From the time when he met Sri Ramakrishna until that time when he became the Sannyâsin, a period of almost five years, the life of Noren apart from his relationship with his Master, was of little interest and much suffering. His father's death, as has been seen, brought on utmost poverty. Previous to that tragic event the family had lived in much comfort, and even in luxury, for money came freely and it was spent freely.

The father was still living when Noren met Sri Ramakrishna, but he paid little attention to the relationship of his son with the Saint. Then, too, Noren had not as yet *consciously or fully* become the disciple of his Master. He was still in the doubting mood. Had the father really feared that his son would turn to the life of the monk, it was quite likely that, though he allowed him perfect freedom in every other matter, he would have exerted every means in his power, even force, if needed, to make his son enter the professional and worldly life. For Visvanath Dutta was a man of the world before he was a man of spiritual tendency. He was self-possessed in work and concerned with his own business ; whenever he had hopes for his eldest son, it was always that he should follow the legal profession. He was ambitious for him in this regard. He believed that he would adopt this life and would excel therein, since he had already exhibited marked characteristics and aptitude of becoming a thinker with great analytical power and a man of eloquence. But before he could even have the satisfaction of seeing his son finish the Law course the father passed away. That he thought of a worldly career for his son is evident from the fact that on several occasions, in accordance with the custom of Hindu parents, he had planned for Noren's marriage. For

some reason or other, however, the arrangements would be broken off. Just before his death, practically on the very day of his passing away, he had finally settled upon his son's marriage. It was a very favourable opportunity, the father thought. His death, however, upset these proceedings.

Sri Ramakrishna, whom Noren had now known for some time, was greatly opposed to his marriage. He prayed that it should never occur. It is said that he had set his *will* against it when he heard that the arrangements were being finally settled. When events so shaped themselves that it became impossible, he was greatly relieved, for he held, and rightly so, that Noren was not born for the love of any single person, or for the rearing of a family, but for the saving of souls. After his father's death, Noren became his own master ; and it was quite certain that, so far as he was concerned, he would never marry. So long as his father lived, there was always the possibility that he would make conditions so intolerable for Noren that he would either have to marry or leave his home. He had, however, opposed the various proposals his father had made with great vigour, one might say even with obstinacy. But one does not know but that he would have yielded had too strong a pressure been brought to bear upon him. His obstinate opposition was a great factor in the constant delay, for otherwise a Hindu lad is married at an early age and before he has much individuality or will of his own. But Noren had developed individuality, and he manifested it at every turn in his life at that time.

It is said, however, that he finally did consent to marry, when his father had secured an alliance with a powerful and wealthy Calcutta family who were ready to pay a magnificent sum as dowry to Noren's people and to send him to England for education. Noren was in an ambitious mood at this time, and it might have been that the flattering opportunity and the desire to please his father, also to see the world and to provide himself with a finished education, were too great a temptation, even for him. Whatever the

situation was, before the marriage could occur the father passed away. It was certainly a critical moment in Noren's career ; it may be said that it was *the* critical moment from one point of view.

With his father's death Noren became the head of his house. Heavy responsibilities fell upon his shoulders. An onerous task was before him ; and did any stray thoughts or feelings of becoming a monk enter his mind, he would be in despair because of the enormous obstacles which stood in the way. The affairs of the household were, in reality, too much for a lad of twenty summers. The story of the legal entanglement from which he extricated his family and himself has already been told. His hardships and his self-sacrifice and utter selflessness with regard to his people have already been noted. Added to all this, were the rigour of his Law studies and the tempest of his thought and the struggle of his soul to find truth. Troubles heaped themselves upon him, until he did not know where to turn or what to do. But during this period he knew a place where he could unburden all his woes. That was at Dakshineswar and later at the Cossipur Garden at the Feet of his Master. Meanwhile at home it was struggle, struggle, struggle ! And to have met this struggle as manfully as he did, was assuredly as much to his credit as though he had performed the most difficult ascetic practices. For his life during all this period was a living from hand to mouth ; indeed, it might be said that it was one continual proximity to starvation. And his pride was constantly on the alert, concealing the condition of the family. He secured several positions as schoolmaster and as articled clerk to an attorney. By this means he managed to secure a sufficient income to insure a bare livelihood. The family was assisted, also, by near relatives.

Noren pursued his studies eagerly during this time. He was also busied with much reading of all kinds of books, and it was mostly serious literature. His intellectual life was his chief diversion. At this time he had well nigh given up his active relationship with the Brahmo Samaj

and his greatest joy was to sit at the Feet of his Master. But there were times when many occurrences, disquieting to his mind, happened in the domestic circle. When times are hard, many awkward anxieties are born which are passed over pleasantly or with indifference in less difficult times. The mother grew anxious as time went on, lest her son should leave the family in order to take upon himself the vows of the monastic life. She would often broach the subject to him, and he would reply in a casual or indifferent manner. Something told her, however, that she need not worry, for her son would not desert her. His manner spoke louder than words. But it was a great shock to his natural tendency for idealisation and spiritual romance to be reminded, every now and then, of the prosaic elements and of the bondage of worldly life. He shouldered his responsibility in silence, forgetting all his worries in the Garden of Dakshineswar and in company with his friends and college-mates. Then, too, there was a certain light-heartedness about him, one might say, a certain elasticity of temperament which stood him in good stead at all times. He was naturally kind ; and he could not bear to see suffering in others without trying to alleviate it. Thus, he would speak to his mother, promising her all his loyalty and cheering her up as well as he could.

However, Noren's determination to remain unmarried was inflexible. The ideal of celibacy became a principle with him. He became more and more filled with the *passion for purity*. Even following upon his father's death, his marriage would have netted the family a goodly sum, in fact, the possibilities of luxury as compared with their condition at that time. His family were well-connected, and many were the families who would have been glad to count him as their son-in-law. His mother would press him with entreaties in this regard, but he would implore her not to insist in this matter. And when the members of the family would join in pressing him to lead the householder's life and repeatedly and vehemently insisted upon his marriage, he said

to them with overwhelming force, "What ! Are you going to get me drowned ! For once married, it will all be over with me !" It was found later on to be of the greatest good to the family that he had thus insisted. For had he "married and settled down" as the saying goes, and had become a successful lawyer, he certainly would not have cast a radiance upon the family, as he did in the capacity of a monk.

He waited patiently for almost three years. Then the time came when he felt that the family could dispense with him. There were other sources of income ; though meagre, they nevertheless, according to the proverb, "kept the wolf from the door." The family remained silent on these matters and Noren most of all, so that how they managed to get along has always been a matter of speculation. Little by little Noren drifted from his family. He would spend days at Dakshineswar. Latterly he spent a great deal of his time at the Cossipur Garden-house, whither Sri Ramakrishna was removed when his illness grew worse, and he lovingly looked after him. In the last days of the Master's life he was practically almost always at his side. Thus, when he actually severed his connection with the family after the passing of his Master, the shock of separation was comparatively slight.

Then, too, he never completely broke off relationship with his people, in the sense that so many other monks do, both in the East and in the West. He always kept in touch with his mother. He would sometimes visit his home, when in Calcutta, to console her. His home Noren always thought of as holy with tender memories and sweet human sentiment, for, above all, his mother was there. And when he heard that two of his sisters had died in great unhappiness, and he was far away, he was overcome with grief for weeks and fled into the deeper wilds, as at that time he was a wandering monk, like Buddha of old. His experiences with his family made him a patriot and a social reformer ; for he felt for the woes of the starving millions in India, because he himself had starved

and knew what stavation meant ; and he thought of and longed for the education and advancement of Indian womanhood, because his own sisters whom he loved dearly, had had so many bitter experiences in life, and had come thereby to a tragic and untimely death.

Noren really loved his mother. He was always steadfast in his devotion to her. And his mother always took great pride in him. To a young Western disciple, who had come to India, long after the death of her son, she said with triumph and great dignity, "*My* boy became a Sannyâsin at twenty-four!" But she might have said that he was a Sannyâsin from a much earlier age, in fact, from the time of his first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna. Aye, he was, in his Master's opinion, a "*Born Brahmajñāni*", that is, a born Knower of God. And there had been many noted incidents of greatness in his boyhood and youth which his mother remembered and cherished. Certainly, she often wondered as to *who* her boy was. Even in his boyhood he was intense. In his later youth he was intense as an agnostic, then as a seeker after God, and then as a saint and, last of all, as a patriot and prophet.

The Divine Mother took charge both of Noren and his people. Sri Ramakrishna had prayed to Her for him and She had answered his prayer. The family was never in want during the whole time of Noren's monastic life. And when he finally became the monk, he did so in the glad consciousness that all was well with his people.

But, of course, mothers are always mothers, and there were different moods which came upon Bhuvaneswari Mata. Sometimes she was glad he had become a saint and a benefactor of the people. But at other times the woman in her was uppermost, and she would enter reveries wherein she peopled her home with other inmates, amongst them being a beautiful daughter-in-law and loving grandchildren, the children of Noren. But fate is inexorable, and certain souls are born for a Purpose. Sentiment must give way before necessity, and necessity is the mother of greatness. In later

life, though Bhuvaneswari Mata hoped that her two other sons would marry, she could not succeed in persuading them to do so.

From now one can survey the life of Noren as a monk. For so he was virtually, in the training received at the Feet of his Master. His life hereafter becomes a record of spiritual progress and spiritual realisations which made him the Spirit incarnate of Hinduism. With the story of his family completed, one can now give full attention to the growth of the spiritual consciousness within him ; one can join with him in the vision which was his and in the glory of his Master, the Paramahansa Sri Ramakrishna, whose spiritual child he became, whose very *Self* he became.



XXXVIII

GURU AND DISCIPLE.

During his training with Sri Ramakrishna, Noren's life is to be told, not so much as a record of events, as of ideas and realisations.

Wonderful are the ties which bind souls. Wonderful, indeed, was the relationship between Sri Ramakrishna and Noren. The full story of it can never be told. Only they knew the spirit of it. It was deep, deep, immeasurably and unutterably deep. The emotional and spiritual power of it is told somewhat in the wonderful words of love, loyalty, understanding, devotion and self-abandonment which the Swami Vivekananda in his writings has left with posterity, in regard to his Master. So close, so deep, so divinely mutual was their love and regard, one for the other, that the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna and those of the Swami Vivekananda always think of these two souls in one and the same moment of thought as Ramakrishna-Vivekananda. For the thought of the one implies an awareness of the other.

From the very first moment in which Sri Ramakrishna had looked upon the face of Noren he was caught up in the net of a deep love for him. From the first moment of acquaintance it became a spiritual relationship. For the words of Sri Ramakrishna to his disciple were all in as piritual setting of thought and vision. Noren had come to him in the tempest of the spiritual impulse, asking him "Sire, have you seen God?" and the Master, answering in the affirmative, had almost in that moment lifted Noren into the sphere of ecstatic vision. The progress of the relationship was a constant, closer knitting of the bonds and, also, a constant growth in illumination for the soul of the disciple. The climax was reached when the spirit of the Master, before his departure, descended upon the disciple. Now it is seen that the relationship of

the two served a great impersonal purpose, namely, the Revival of Hinduism and the preaching of the Modern Gospel to the peoples of the earth. The close ties of this spiritual relationship became the bonds wherewith were bound the doctrines and the teachings which the Master imparted and the disciple in time spread, and which have already become salvation to innumerable souls.

But even as Noren's education into the spiritual consciousness of Sri Ramakrishna was a long process of understanding, and at first even a conflict with his Master as to the genuineness of his realisations, even so did he find difficulty in understanding the greatness of the heart of the sage. At first, Noren had spoken of Sri Ramakrishna as a brain-sick old man, subject to hallucinations ; so also he thought him over-sentimental, and thus could not reconcile him with his ideal of saintship or seership. Thus it was an education here, as well. In both instances, it appeared as if Noren's interpretation was correct ; but in both instances it proved to be false, for he came to accept Sri Ramakrishna as a man of a well-balanced intellect and a well-balanced heart.

Sri Ramakrishna's love for Noren was such that if Noren failed to come for some days to visit him he would become inconsolable. He would sit, weeping alone. He would pray and pray to the Divine Mother with a sorrow-laden heart, begging that She would make it possible for him to come. And whenever he cried and prayed like this, his beloved Noren would come to him, as if drawn by an unaccountable attraction. Those disciples who had known Sri Ramakrishna and had become his devotees long before his meeting with Noren were astounded at this. It was out of the usual order of things. They could not understand. Some criticised, but the Master remained silent. He knew only one desire, and that was that Noren should come. It was remarkable. And Noren, who was the object of this exceeding love, likewise, could not understand. He was only a lad of some twenty years. It was a puzzle to him. He regarded Sri Ramakrishna differently as different moods came upon him, and according

to the frequency with which he visited Dakshineswar. Sometimes he feared him, thinking that the *power* of the man might affect him in some strange ways, influencing his will. Then he would say to himself, "O well ! He is only a sentimental old man." But at other times he would feel overcome by the Master's affection for him and would lovingly respond to it. He would think to himself that, after all, no one loved him as did Sri Ramakrishna. It was at this time, also, that he was hard pressed by misfortune ; and he often felt worried and distracted. In these moments he would leave everything and repair to the Garden of Dakshineswar. Looking deep into his Master's eyes, he would study and wonder ; sometimes he would hesitate ; at other times he would give himself over to the flood of religious feeling. He would give his own soul, as it were, to the Master in certain moments when he was carried away by the greatness of the Saint's personality. But then, again, he would hesitate. Finally, however, he gave himself over to him completely. And then there would be questions and answers and conversations and jollity ; and Noren would return home counting such days as the happiest he had ever known. It was really these moods of sweetness of relationship and of love which tided Noren over the times during which he did not understand his Master intellectually. Were it not for his love for the Master he would have given him up at the first meeting. But something "held" him. As Noren himself said at that time, "It is his love for me that binds me to him."

But the character and spirituality of his Master's love for him, Noren came to realise on a certain occasion early in their relationship. Noren came to Dakshineswar. Other disciples were present. Noren himself was in a light mood. He was happy and felt very free. It was characteristic of him, amongst all the disciples of the Master, that he alone approached him with familiarity. It was a familiarity, however, born of a consciousness of the depth of love which his Master bore for him. It was this instinctive sense of oneness and sweet and inseparable relationship with his Master that

made it possible for him to criticise him even in his very presence and to ask him bold questions as to the authenticity of his realisations. Noren's search for truth was respected by Sri Ramakrishna, and he not only allowed him to catechise him but felt pleased within himself at his doing so. Otherwise, how would Noren have dared to ! For in India a discrepancy in years is a discrepancy in relationship. The young must address the elders in terms of most profound respect. So this alone would have prevented Noren from speaking critically to Sri Ramakrishna, had it not been for his Master's attitude to him and his own personal understanding of their relationship. Otherwise, there were many incidents which would have made Noren seem guilty of impertinence.

It so happened that Noren had come this day after many days. The Master had sent one disciple after another to him entreating him to come, if only for once. So Noren came and the Master's joy knew no bounds. After the usual salutation and formal inquiries, Sri Ramakrishna told Noren how anxious he had been to see him. Noren in reply said to him, "Why do you think of me so much at all times?" Then, adding softly by way of a sweet jest, "You will become like me, if you constantly think of me. The Raja Bharat, thinking of his pet deer, forgot his ascetic practices, and in his next life he was born a deer." Sri Ramakrishna said nothing ; but he was evidently moved. Did he think that his attachment to Noren would become a spiritual bondage in the paths of realisation ? Certainly his love for Noren seemed almost equal to his longing for God, in its spiritual character and intensity. He was silent. The other disciples were astounded and wondered. Noren also wondered. Surely he would never have pained his Master intentionally. What then ?

Hours passed. Evening came on. The temple-bells commenced to ring. Singing and chanting were heard. Sri Ramakrishna entering the temple fell into a deep state of Samâdhi before the Divine Presence, when the last waving of the lights was flashed before the Mother. The time of service drew to a close. The temple was filled with incense. The

bells had ceased to ring and Sri Ramakrishna returned to this plane of consciousness with the name of the Mother upon his lips. He went back to his room. Noren was still there ; so were some others. The Master seated himself upon the floor. The others sat around him. He then addressed Noren saying, "Noren ! Noren ! Mother has told me all. She says, 'Noren is but a boy, not as yet mature. Why should you mind his words ? It is because you see Narayana in him that you feel so drawn to him'. And so I do not care a straw for the words you spoke to me. They are nothing to me. From the day when I shall no longer see Narayana in you, I shall not look upon your face." A hushed silence prevailed. All now understood. The problem was now solved. Noren sat silent, somewhat abashed, with eyes cast upon the Feet of the Master, with his hearing fixed upon the words just uttered. Sri Ramakrishna had dignified their relationship beyond any human and personal sentiment. He had spoken to the effect that his love for him amounted to a perceiving of divinity, and a devotion thereunto. This altered matters. The other disciples now realised that the Master had made Noren the idol of his heart because he had seen, in some manner beyond their understanding, the divinity and the potentialities of his soul. True, he saw the divinity and spiritual character in these others who were also his disciples, but in Noren's case it was an *intense seeing*. Consequently it was an *intense longing* for the presence of Noren. It was also this seeing of divinity in Noren, of which the Mother Herself had spoken, and of which the Master was luminously aware.

At another time while speaking to some of the elder disciples in explaining his relationship with Noren and other young boys, Sri Ramakrishna said : "Hazra takes me to task for my being anxious to see the boys. He says, 'When will you think of God ?' * * * * I felt uneasy in my mind and I said to Mother, 'Hazra asks why should I think so much of Norendra and other boys.' And Mother at once showed me that She Herself becomes human forms. She manifests

Herself in pure bodies. When I came out of this Samâdhi, after seeing that Form, I became angry with Hazra and said, 'Oh, the fool ! How he unsettled my mind !' But again I thought, 'Why to blame the poor fellow ! How should he know !'

Continuing, the Master said : "I know these boys as Embodied Narayana. When I saw Norendra for the first time I found that he had no body-idea. As soon as I touched him at the heart he lost outward consciousness. * * * * Gradually intense longing came upon me to see him again and again, and it made my heart wring with pain. Then I told Bholanath, 'How is it that I feel thus,—and that for a boy, a Kayastha by caste ?' Then Bholanath said, 'Sire, this is all right. It is explained in the Mahabharata that when the mind of a man of Samâdhi comes down to the normal plane, it recreates itself in the company of men of *sattva* quality. That man rejoices only in meeting with men of the highest spirituality.' Hearing this I got peace of mind, but sometimes I used to sit down and cry in my agony to see Norendra."

In this light it becomes easy to understand why Sri Ramakrishna was constantly saying great things concerning Noren, both to him personally and to others. At times his remarks upon Noren's spiritual character and worth were startling. Noren himself often felt out of place in the presence of others when these remarks were being made. His Master spoke quite frankly, freely and simply, even as a child speaks. He seemed to realise that whatever he might say would cause no conceit or sense of self-importance in the mind of his disciple. Though he frequently felt that Sri Ramakrishna rather over-emphasised his deserts, Noren surely gathered great strength of will and inspiration from these remarks. And they were assuredly a helpful memory with him in later years when, as the Swami Vivekananda, he took upon himself the responsibility of preaching a great message. They were a stimulus and an encouragement to him. Withal, Sri Ramakrishna was possessed of an accurate understanding of personal temperament. He had a way of *knowing* his disciples.

and there were certain methods by which he tested them. He would sometimes put them, with a touch, into a form of deep trance and in that state the mind would speak, of itself, as was the case with advanced disciples, or he would ask certain questions and it would respond.

But as to Noren he seemed to know him from the very beginning as a great soul embodied. At one time he said to those who had gathered about him, "Well, if Keshub is possessed of one mark of greatness, Noren has nineteen such marks !" At another time he said : "In Keshub I found (in a Vision) *Jnanam* lighted in the form of a candle ; and in Norendra I saw *Jnanam* shining as the Sun itself !" Such were the comparisons which Sri Ramakrishna drew between his disciple and the great Brahmo leader, Keshub Chandra Sen, whom also he greatly loved. Keshub, too, was a disciple, though, it may be said, secretly so ; and unquestionably many of the theological ideas he preached towards the latter part of his great career were traceable to the direct influence of Sri Ramakrishna.

In the relationship between the Master and his disciple it is singular to note that Noren was allowed to offer no single act of personal service to him. Fanning and other attentions, which the disciple must render to his spiritual guide in the way of service and training, were offered to Sri Ramakrishna by other disciples. Was it because of his seeing the Divine, the Shiva, so intensely in Noren, that he held him too sacred to do any *sevdā*, or service, to him ? For *sevdā* is only for the purification of heart ; what need has he for *sevdā* whose heart is already purified ! Let it not be thought, however, that Noren did not feel this as a great deprivation. He would insist in offering service in some way or other, out of his love for the Master and his own sense of humility ; but the latter would on no account allow this, and dissuaded him by saying, "Your path is different !"

Touching, beyond words, was the love between Noren and Sri Ramakrishna when it had attained the culmination of understanding on the part of the disciple. Often, often,

on simply seeing Noren, the Master would pass into a state of ecstatic Samādhi. The other disciples remember well how, on a certain occasion, when he had not seen him for some time, he advanced to Noren when the latter reached the landing-ghat at Dakshineswar, and touching his disciple's face, began to chant the most holy word of the Vedas and went into an ecstatic Samādhi. And at his meeting Noren the third time at Dakshineswar he had lost himself in Samādhi and in that state addressed him saying, "Narayan, you have taken the body for my sake! Before taking this human form I said to Mother, 'How can I go alone, O Mother! How can I live on earth if I have not a pure-minded Bhakta uncontaminated by Lust and Gold to talk to!'" Continuing he said, "you came and woke me up last night and told me, 'Here I have come now!'"

At all times when in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna Noren felt taken out of himself, as it were. Many, many times, while the song of the disciples rose high upon the evening air or when the Master, speaking of the highest Verities, entered the highest state of the spiritual consciousness, a great flood of feeling would come across Noren's soul. He would seem to think and feel himself in another world. He would come into communion with stirring powers within the depth of his being. Aye, the flood-gates of vision were to open. The windows of his soul were to be thrown wide open. He was to have glimpses of the divine life. Aye, more than this, he was to have the full vision of that life. Indeed, he was to enter it in that moment when he attained unto the highest consciousness. Indeed, he was to become one with That.

XXXIX

THE MONASTIC CONSCIOUSNESS :

RENUNCIATION—PURITY.

Strong are the fetters of this world. Sharp as the edge of a sword is the path out of illusion. Dense is the darkness of the world. Terrible is desire. Like unto an all-consuming fire does desire burn across the world. Terrible is the madness of passion. Terrible is the madness of greed. These are rampant in the world, making its bondage, causing its dense darkness and all its woe. Like adamant must be the determination of the soul to cut its way through the jungle of bondage; and like adamant was the spiritual strength of Sri Ramakrishna, and even like adamant was that strength which he imparted to his disciples and, particularly, to Noren. Realisation comes only after enormous effort; and character is the test of all realisation.

Sri Ramakrishna did not only impart rich spiritual teaching unto his disciples, he imparted, likewise, a stimulus and strength to follow that teaching. His own life, the force of his utterances, the readiness with which he experienced the highest state of consciousness, his communion with divine realities, his overwhelming sense of the obstacles to the spiritual life,—all these were as a great light to the disciples, and in that light they gained strength and a glorious spiritual consciousness.

The triumph of religion is the finding of God. It is the transcendence over the limitations of the physical consciousness. But the triumph is the result of struggle, and it comes only after having seen the reality beyond those which make up the phenomenal life. Certainly the task is tremendous. The fog of sense blinds the vision. Heavy clouds of sense keep the mind fixed on things below. The radiance of reality is

dimmed. Shadows of reality are cast, in spite of the dimness, upon the intellectual consciousness,—and man speaks of philosophy. But what as to the substance of these shadows! What as to the rending of the veils! What as to developing the spiritual vision so as to pierce through the darkness! This is the successful effort of the saint. The way is one for all saints. It has been preached from time immemorial. Long ago in the dawn of time, the clarion note of triumph rang out. One had found the Way. He said, "Behold! I have found the Ancient One beyond all darkness and all illusion!" And the path was through extreme, all-embracing renunciation and through a passion for purity. Terrible is the journey; long is the way, but the end is sure. And the end is—God, the Absolute.

For twelve long years had Sri Ramakrishna performed unremittingly the Sadhanas and penances of the ascetic life. For twelve long years he had sojourned on the paths of *tapasyâ*, or the rigorous training of the mind into the thinking of God. Ordinarily, the mind is restless. It is a wanderer whose highway is the broad path of instinct, whose vision is of never-ending desire. And yet, though passion spends itself in despair, and though desire proves fraudulent again and again, still does the mind follow the paths of illusion.

And what is at the bottom of the folly and the misery of the world? What is the fuel on which desire feeds? What are the instruments of bondage? What causes the darkness of the world? Sri Ramakrishna said, "It is *Kâma-Kâncâna*" or Lust and Gold, or he would say, "It is *Kâmini-Kâncâna*," or Woman and Gold! This covers the whole of the import. "Lust and Gold! Woman and Gold!" The desire to let the physical instincts run riot; the desire for the means wherewith to gratify instinct and let the animal nature run wild! These make up the entanglements of the world. Can man break through these snares! Can the soul ever develop such strength of vision, as to see values beyond the objects of the senses! Aye, indeed! So have the sages said. So said Sri Ramakrishna. So said the

Swami Vivekananda. Aye, such is the strength of the soul, that it can even remove mountains, aye, that it can even blot out the universe itself! Such was the inspiration which the blessed Master gave unto his disciples.

To understand the strength of Noren, one must understand the strength of Sri Ramakrishna. How had the Master overcome the great barriers of "Lust and Gold!" For years he had been arriving at the understanding of this synthesis of the units of bondage. Then, having traced all the obstacles to the spiritual life to their source, he manifested divine energy in vanquishing them. To overcome the idea of distinction in sex, he turned to a practical method. Aye, he himself would become a woman, to acquire the feminine consciousness! Therefore, he put on the *sātri*, which is the garment of the Hindu woman. He dwelt with the women members of Mathoor Babu's family, even as one of them, and they regarded him in the same light. It was wonderful. It was a triumphant demonstration of how the mind can be *made* subordinate to *will*. It revealed the glory of the soul. He chose this intense method because he was determined to acquire an *intense* sense of sexlessness. Verily, the quest for purity had become a passion with him. His mind could no longer regard womanhood in any setting of sex. He looked upon all women as *Mother*. And even so did he address them. There was no half-way method with Sri Ramakrishna. He knew the deceptions of the senses and he knew, also, how fleeting is that consciousness of strength which comes of the pride, "I am already pure." He admitted that the soul in its essence was pure; but he asserted, likewise, that the manifestation of that purity in a grand stability of character, was a task demanding unflinching determination of will and a constant seeing of the Ideal. Well may one follow in his path and even roll in the dust as he did, in an agony of longing to see God. There was no trifling in these matters with Sri Ramakrishna. He knew that the only way was the immediate cutting-off of all bonds. If religion is the conquest of the soul over physical nature,

and if it consists in the manifestation of spiritual life, then the reason for the monastic spirit is seen at once. Verily, "Only the pure in heart shall see God !"

And as to his conquest over "Gold." The vision is ineffaceable of Sri Ramakrishna sitting beside the Ganges-bank with gold in one hand and earth in the other. He would say aloud, as if addressing the gold itself, that gold can buy many things in the way of luxuries and comfort, but it has not the power to make the soul see God. Thereafter he would denounce it. What was it but dirt, if it could not take one to God ! And he would mix and shuffle the earth and the pieces of gold together, holding the thought that gold itself was dust and that nothing but useless dust was in his hands. The climax would come. He would *realise* the gold as dirt. Then, standing up, triumphant, he would throw both the gold and the dust into the flowing waters of the Ganges. Extraordinary was that realisation. The divine consciousness had come upon the Master. He was no longer the personality struggling to realise the worthlessness of gold and of all worldly possessions which gold can buy. He was Sri Ramakrishna, the Divine Man, the Man-God, the God-Man !

On these two objects of renunciation Sri Ramakrishna was inexorable. Insistent offers came that he should accept the great Temple of Dakshineswar with its enormous income ; other offers came to him involving great sums of money. He refused them all, as such offers were repugnant to him. When he was pressed to accept, he literally drove the well-meaning donors away, crying out, "What shall I do with your money ? What shall I do with it ? Why does Mother bring such men to me !" When he was ill and his boy disciples were nursing him, and the householder disciples were providing all the necessary expenses, one of the latter a man of some means, contributed a certain sum of money towards the maintenance of the household. Being much older than the boy-disciples he wanted to boss them, and shortly after he grumbled at the expenditure, though the disciples were most economical. They were in a quandary. Sri

Ramakrishna heard of it. "What !" said he. "This is no place for us ! Let us go !" And addressing Noren he added, "I will go and stay anywhere you take me !" And taking up his one possession, a cloth, he was ready to depart then and there from the house, preferring to live under a tree if need be, with Noren and the other boy-disciples, depending upon the Lord alone.

It was this divine spirit in Sri Ramakrishna, this utter contempt for money and the things of the world, which gave weight to his teachings. Womanhood, to him, was synonymous with motherhood. He had the highest vision of womanhood. This was the spirit of the man,—indomitably spiritual, invincibly divine.

The disciples of Sri Ramakrishna were men, in many instances, grown old in worldly ways. The others were boys who later on became members of the Ramakrishna Order of monks. And all of them knew him for years. There were several, bolder than the others, who tested the Master. One, a householder, took him to a house, where it had been arranged that dancing-girls should endeavour to turn his mind from the highest truth. The Master walked into the house, not knowing who were the inmates. He ascended the stairs and was left in the drawing-room all by himself. And then came in the dancing marionettes of sin, beautiful and seductive, and exhibited their charms to him. "O Mother ! O Mother ! Where have you brought me !" An agonising cry, as of a child in trouble, rent the air. And then the body of Sri Ramakrishna became rigid as though dead. His soul had gone into Samādhi. The scene changed. The women were amazed. Holiness filled the room. The women, full of remorse, fell at the feet of the Master. And, turning to him who had brought the saint into the presence of sinners with their sins, the women exclaimed, "Why did you bring a saint here ? He is a Sukadeva. He is a Man of God. We can only look upon him as a child." And Sri Ramakrishna, coming to earthly consciousness, stretched out his hands and blessed the women. And lo ! They were raised into an ecstatic mood !

Such was the roaring fire of purity and renunciation before which Noren sat in rapt wonderment. Who would not become radiant in purity with such an one for Master? And a like test occurred with Noren as had occurred with Sri Ramakrishna, though the situation was somewhat different because of the difference in temperament. Some of his wealthy friends asked Noren to come for a drive to their garden. He consented joyfully. Suddenly the carriage entered a narrow lane, and after a short distance it stopped in front of a house. All alighted, and entered the grounds where a garden-party was being held. Noren knew nothing of what had been arranged. Merrymakers were there, and Noren enjoyed their singing and pressed by them sang himself. After a time he grew tired, and was told that he might rest comfortably in an adjoining room. His friends, seeing him alone, sent a dancing-girl to amuse him. He was as simple as a child with her. She told him many interesting things about her life, and he asked her many questions with a frankness that quite puzzled her. He behaved just as a brother with her. Then she confided in him, telling him the sorrows and the misfortunes of the life she led. And then seeing how she had engaged all his interest and sympathy, she misinterpreted his attitude and took a fancy to him. She begged him to come and see her, saying, "We will make famous friends." And then the moment came when she made him know what she felt. Instantly he remembered Sri Ramakrishna. He thought of God. All sense of amusement left him. He became serious and started to his feet. The thought of his being a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna and yet joining in such a frivolous party, brought tears to his eyes. And he said to the girl, "Excuse me, I must be going now. I have a genuine sympathy for you and wish you well. If you know in your heart that it is a weakness to lead such a life, you will get over it some day." They parted. When the girl came from Noren's company, she was in a state of bewilderment. This sudden termination of a friendly conversation into a tragic seriousness annoyed her, and she

said to Noren's friends sarcastically, "It is a nice trick you have played upon me, sending me to tempt a Sadhu!"

And at this time, also, there were those who came to Sri Ramakrishna, telling him that Noren was in danger of losing his sense of purity, because of the doubtful character of some of his friends. Sri Ramakrishna knew that Noren's soul was attuned to the very highest spirituality; therefore he seemed unaffected by their words, and felt that their puritanical solicitude was somewhat out of place. He answered them, "You need not have any fear of that," and he added, "Noren *can* not fall into evil ways. The Mother Herself will guard him!"

Such was the training in the monastic consciousness which Noren received; such were his inherent qualities of purity and renunciation. Noren was instinctively pure. And the flame of his innocence was fanned by the inspiration and teaching of Sri Ramakrishna into the roaring fire of spirituality. He became conscious of purity as a priceless treasure to be attained and cherished at all costs. Far removed from the evils of this world were that group at Dakshineswar. Their only pleasure was devotion to the Lord. They were all spiritual lions, testing their strength in the presence of this Lion amongst Men, this Conqueror of *Kāmini-Kāñchana* this Man who saw God, this Man who became one with God—Bhagavān Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva.



XL

DAYS OF ECSTASY AT DAKSHINESWAR.

It may be truthfully stated that only Noren, amongst the disciples, *fully* understood the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna. He alone went into the heart of the Master's thought. He alone weighed the words of the Master in the balance. He alone *dared* to doubt. But, then, he alone had the glorified conviction and consciousness with regard to the Master, which comes of having transcended doubt. "O Mother!" had cried Sri Ramakrishna from the temple-stairs and with eyes fixed upon the Image of the Mother in the distance, "Give me one who will even challenge my realisations." And that man had now come. And from the very beginning the Master understood that his prayer to the Mother had been answered. Sri Ramakrishna admired courage and independence in thought and conduct. He loved intensity and sincerity of character. The other disciples hung with rapt attention upon each word he uttered. Their greatness was that of the heart. They were *bhaktas*, that is, they loved the Master. Theirs was the vision which comes of love. They knew Sri Ramakrishna only through their burning love for him. But Noren would question him. Noren would smile at his statements and criticise them. Noren, too, had love for the Master such as no other disciple had, and it was this love for him which caused him to respect, to revere and to adore him. But he would not be satisfied until he had made his convictions of the truth of Sri Ramakrishna's teaching absolutely infallible, in so far as the analytical intellect was capacitated to sanction the utterances of a saint and seer.

Noren was in the *savitarka* state of mind. That is, he was in the argumentative state of consciousness in order to arrive at truth. He aroused a tempest of thought with regard to his understanding and acceptance of the teaching

imparted to him. All the disciples spoke of Noren at this time as a roaring lion in argumentation. He would storm the minds of those who entered into discussion on religious matters with him in the presence of the Master. He would startle them with the profundity of his knowledge, citing Western and Oriental philosophers, verbatim, to questions which arose. And in the midst of such discussion, Sri Ramakrishna would sit wondering, sometimes losing himself in Samādhi at the learning of Noren. It was more than mere learning which Noren revealed. It was the spirit of learning, which he made incarnate in himself. His was a terrible storm of intellectual sincerity. It was a sincerity which transcended all intellectual definition and description; it could only be called spiritual. It was this *power* of searching for truth, this triumphant, partly intellectual and partly spiritual, finding of truth which filled Sri Ramakrishna with a feeling bordering on respect for Noren. Yes, this was the "Shiva-nature" or the "Shiva-power" in Noren, as Sri Ramakrishna used to say. In some transcendent method of seeing, Sri Ramakrishna saw this as a manifestation of that divine power and consciousness, whose grand climax soars beyond all illusion—the supermundane power of Shiva! On a certain occasion this insight attained a climax, breathing itself forth in a remarkable utterance of Sri Ramakrishna concerning his disciple. Noren was advancing in the distance, coming towards the great meditation-tree under which the Master and disciples were seated with thought concentrated upon God. Suddenly, the eyes of the Master opened. He spoke out. The disciples were aroused from thought. "Behold! Here is Noren. See, see! O what power of insight he has! It is like a shoreless sea of radiance! The Mother, Mahamaya Herself, cannot approach more than within ten feet of him! She is bound by the very glory which She has imparted to him!"

Then, turning from outward consciousness, he prayed aloud in ecstasy that the Mother might dim that radiance in order that Noren might be able to *work*. "O Mother," he prayed "Put a little of Thy Maya into Norendra!" For,

otherwise, he would be concerned, by the impulse of the natural tendency of his soul, only with the highest reaches of the personal realisation ;—otherwise he would be immersed in eternal meditation and would be mindful only of the Supreme Reality and thus be lost to the world.

Yes, it was strange. Sri Ramakrishna knew what he was praying for. The other disciples were amazed ; but they accepted Sri Ramakrishna's valuation of Noren as indisputable. Had he not gauged the depths of their own natures also ! Had he not had the vision of the special divinity to which each mind tended when they had come to him for the first time ! Had he not told each one of them his secret tendencies ! By merely touching them he had imparted powers and realisations unto them ! Who were they to doubt when he said of Noren, "He has nineteen of the powers of Shiva !" or, "He is a burning, roaring fire consuming all impurities to ashes," and added, "Even should Noren live on beef and pork, it could not harm in the least the great power of spirituality within him !" How well chosen were the words of revelation which the Master spoke in relation to Noren's character ! They bore meaning years later. When some over-zealous Christian missionaries, with a view to shock the Hindu social and religious sensibilities in India regarding the Swami Vivekananda, who was the idol of the hour to the Hindus, spread the news that he was living in American hotels, the words of the Master came to the *gurubhais* or brother-disciples. What mattered it, they thought, even if he had had to violate a Hindu social custom of later growth in giving out his message to the West ! Was he not a roaring fire of spirituality burning all impurities to ashes ! He was Free, Free, Free ! He was the monk, the Man with a Message. He had gone beyond all custom and all nationality !

Thus it was that when certain admirers who came to Dakshineswar offered fruits and sweetmeats for the Master to partake of, he would set them aside. He would not eat them himself save when he was sure as to the character and the motive of the giver. He would not, in such a case, like-

wise, give them to his other disciples. But Noren could take them. Nothing could affect him. He was the roaring fire of purity. No stain could come upon him, so the Master thought. He would reserve these delicacies only for Noren, and if he did not come to him the Master would, whenever the opportunity presented itself, even send them to Noren's house. Noren wondered at this peculiar discrimination his Master exercised as to food and the receiving of presents from certain persons. He thought that it was perhaps an eccentricity due to superstition or to a puritanical squeamishness. But Sri Ramakrishna insisted that, in these cases, when he refused to accept offered food or other things for himself the giver was a man of questionable character. This interested Noren. Was it true? He would find out for himself. So, when the first occasion offered itself he studied the character of the person in question. He did this again and again as opportunity permitted. In every instance he found that Sri Ramakrishna had acted rightly. Then he thought, "What a wonderful man is this! It is past understanding! How is he empowered with the reading of the minds of others! Certainly, to say the least, he is a saint! He is, indeed, a perfected Yogi!"

Only those who have sat at the Feet of the Master, can know the ocean of sweet intimacy and oneness with Sri Ramakrishna in which the disciples were bathed. It was a sweet, tender, natural, human, easy and free relationship, free from any affectation and free from the repelling spirit of that egoism and aloofness which so often characterises the atmosphere which surrounds the Guru. The spirit was, indeed, divine; the gist of the teaching was inspiring beyond all inspiration; the ecstasy was overpowering; the Presence of God was always felt. And yet, there was much laughter and fun beneath the spreading trees of Dakshineswar and in the Master's room, which stood adjacent to the Temple. The Master and the disciples would often sit under the boughs of the trees talking intimately and sweetly. And every now and then the course of human joy would be inter-

rupted by some overreaching spiritual remark of the Master. And then, human joy would soar into divine blessedness.

There under the moonlight beside the flowing waters they would sit, or perhaps, in some secluded corner of the great grove of Dakshineswar; and those who passed in the distance would feel strangely drawn towards that spot. They would anchor their boats at the Temple-*ghat*, or they would leave the main road and wander through the peace and stillness of the trees and evening air, until reaching the joyous assembly of the devotees they would take the dust of the Master's feet and join in the chorus of song, or else with ecstasy of soul drink in the nectar of immortality which flowed, as words, from the lips of the blessed saint. It may be that twenty or thirty of the disciples were there, and Noren among them.

Some of the disciples would stop for the night to be with the Master. Some slept in the Verandah at the south-east corner of the Master's living-room, and some in the room itself. At twelve o'clock all would be fast asleep. Sri Ramakrishna alone remained awake in meditation, or in ecstasy. And the rest which the body enjoys during the state of ecstasy or Samâdhi, is more thorough even than that which is produced by natural sleep. Then, it may be, that at two or three o'clock he would chant, in the dead stillness, the names of the Lord, accompanied by prayers, and call out, "Arise! Awake! The hour of meditation is at hand!" And the Master would begin to sing; and across the sweet silence of those early hours the names of the Lord would rise and fall in the echo and the ecstasy of song. Then the disciples would scramble up from sleep. Everyone would be all attention. Everyone would sit in meditation. Peace reigned; sweet, sweet peace, and God.

Indeed, to be with Sri Ramakrishna was, in itself, a *tapasya* and a *sadhana*. It was in itself a rising beyond all bodily ideas and limitations of sense. But it was, also, a joyous condition of things, not a sighing and crucifixion. It required concentration of the highest order and innermost

character to follow the Master in his thought. It stirred the whole soul of the devotee to realisation and ecstatic fervour to enter the field of divine emotion with which Sri Ramakrishna painted his words and in which he soared, beyond all words, to God. The company of Sri Ramakrishna was, in itself, a most compelling stimulus to spirituality. Thought literally seethed at the Dakshineswar Garden. Emotion literally blazed there. There the soul of things literally shone forth.

And Noren felt in his element there. All his boyish enthusiasm was let loose there. He was like a young lion sporting joyously in the presence of a strong but indulgent parent. All that pent-up energy of mind and heart, which revealing itself piecemeal in former times, as it were, had brought on a great anguish of mind and tempest of heart, now let itself loose. It manifested itself as a torrent of spiritual energy. Sri Ramakrishna understood and was delighted beyond speech. As has been said, the flights of Noren's soul were visible to him ; and the great emotional power of it all would send the Master into numerous and repeated ecstasies and stages of Samâdhi. This was fire eating fire. The whole atmosphere at the Dakshineswar Garden would become a mass of spiritual flames. It was wonderful ; it was overwhelming ; it was divine. Like a majestic king, venerable in the long years of his spiritual experience, was the old man ; and Noren was like the young prince and heir, full of the fire and energy and vigour of his spiritual inheritance. Sri Ramakrishna understood. He let the spiritual impetus of Noren's mind rise, by the force of its own pressure. He allowed the mind of Noren to become its own *guru*. For so the Hindus believe. They hold that sincerity of heart brings on, of itself, the gradual illumination of the mind. The mind presses of itself into the channels of the vision and the consciousness of reality. Sri Ramakrishna realised this. He allowed Noren to doubt him, to sound him. He said, "Do not accept anything because I have said so. But test everything for yourself. It is not

in assent or in dissent that the goal is to be attained, but in actual and concrete realisation." And this Noren did as it was his nature to do.

Verily, as the sun is vastly above the earth, so was this *guru* above all other *gurus* ; verily, as the sun is vastly above the earth, so was this disciple above all other disciples. They transcended all the traditional ideas of *guru* and disciple. And was it wonderful that Noren should have counted, towards the close of his active life, those days of ecstasy at Dakshin-eswar, as days of eternal blessedness, and his nature as the beloved boy-disciple at that time, his only true and real nature !



XLI

THE METHOD OF THE MASTER'S TEACHING.

A tumult of thought and a tempest of argument had arisen. "Was God Personal or Impersonal? Did God become incarnate, or was Divine Incarnation a myth?" On and on the conversation grew, until it touched all the points of theological inquiry. It was early morning. A mist was everywhere. And the forms of the devotees seemed like shadows in the distance. But the storm of voices was carried along the quiet atmosphere. Sri Ramakrishna had just come out of his meditation. He was alone; the others were at some distance, resting under the mist-laden trees. Sri Ramakrishna stepped from out his room. He heard the chorus of excited voices; and, above the loud words of all the others, he heard the commanding notes of his chief disciple. He listened for some time. The voices of the others gradually grew fainter and fainter. Finally they were hushed. Only Noren's voice rang out clear and excited. He had gained the argument. He had overwhelmed all their theories.

Sri Ramakrishna approached the gathering. His face was luminous; his very presence was radiant. Nearer and nearer he came; and then the opening notes of a song came from his lips. His voice was known to all the devotees of Dakshineswar as musical beyond all description. He sang wonderfully. The morning mists were being dispersed as a great curtain is lifted, disclosing a beautiful scene. For it was a beautiful scene that revealed itself as the sun arose. The trees were beautifully green because of the dampness. A delicious freshness pervaded the whole place. The morning sun shone upon the figure of the saint; and the text of his song rang out thus,—

"O my mind! What avail thy efforts to realise that Being!
Groping about, as thou dost, like a madman in a dark room!"

The song continued : "Go into the six schools of philosophy. There that Being thou shall not find ! Neither in the Tantras, nor in the Vedas ! That Being is fond of the sweet essence of Love!"

The disputing disciples sat silent and ecstatic. Yes, here was the great answer to all their questionings and dubious replies. Sri Ramakrishna never entered into their arguments. With a word or a glance or a song he would teach ; and the teaching was always, "Realisation is the only goal. When realisation comes into the heart all arguments cease. The state of divine knowledge shines forth."

Indeed, Sri Ramakrishna was a teacher who spoke only the language of realisation. He was not metaphysical. He had seen ; he had literally seen the Truth. So, what need of discussing to a hair's point questions that remain forever debatable to the human mind ? Like Buddha of old, Sri Ramakrishna had little use for logic. Spirituality is not the attainment of a great development of the faculty for setting fine theories into fine language. It is realisation. It is character. It is the conquest of "*Kāmini-Kāñchana*." Sri Ramakrishna took the burden of realisation from the plane of discussion into the sphere of personal striving, into the sphere of austerities, and of a realistic effort at vision.

There was another time when argument waxed loud and high. And Noren was again taking the lead as so often happened. "Were the Shastras true ? Were the Vedas inspired ? What was God ?" Such questions took up the time and formed the subjects of discussion. Sri Ramakrishna listened quietly. For some time he listened to the intellectual wrangling. He smiled tenderly upon the group of the disciples whom he loved so dearly. Then he appeared as if impatient with "much talk." He walked leisurely towards the landing-*ghat* of the Temple. Suddenly his eyes fixed themselves intently, now on one side of the *ghat* and then on the other. Then he smiled knowingly.

The disciples arose. The argument had been worn to shreds. Thought grew faint, and the minds of the speakers

were tired and exhausted. They went to the landing-*ghat* where the Master stood. He looked at them as if about to speak. Then, he pointed his hand towards the *ghat*. And there on either side were dogs. One group was howling and barking. The other was busy crunching the bones of a corpse that had floated down with the tide from some distance above. A terrible simile ! Shocking, it might be, but true ! Yes, argument remains until the body of truth has been seen and partaken of. Philosophy is not the point ; realisation *is*.

During those times when discussion rose high, Sri Ramakrishna would never demand silence. Let them talk, they would learn better, he would say. Sometimes, however, he enjoyed it. By it he sensed the spiritual consciousness of his disciples. When the conversation rose to a great pitch of spirituality, the qualities and tendencies of the various speakers revealed themselves. Sri Ramakrishna would see the spiritual side of the intellectual tempest and this would cause him great joy. When Noren, realising the highest flights of philosophical consciousness, would pour out his very soul through the molten forms of thought in song or in beautiful words, Sri Ramakrishna would pass into Samādhi. Noren's conversation was often the utterance, the expression, of that which the Master himself felt. Verily was the Master's company a great school in the training of the soul. There were no dogmatic announcements or teachings. It was all in the nature of a stimulus to personal growth. Each was free to utilise his own powers in discovering and realising the personal potentialities.

There were certain special occasions, however, when Sri Ramakrishna would intervene. These were, for example, when Noren's towering thought endangered the limited vision of another. There was that instance when Noren attacked faith as a means to salvation. He spoke of "blind faith." Sri Ramakrishna finding that his other disciple was being overwhelmed, said, "Noren, what do you mean by 'blind faith' ? The whole of faith is blind. Has faith an 'eye' ? Why say

'blind faith'? Either say simply 'faith' or say 'Jnana', Knowledge. What do you mean by classifying faith as one kind having an eye, and the other being blind?" By these words Sri Ramakrishna meant to convey that even the highest human knowledge, even all philosophy is "blind faith," as compared with one atom of that realisation which comes not from credence or credulity but from an actual perception of reality. Such perception infallibly leads to spiritual vision and to actual realisation. Whereas, all puffed-up and vain knowledge is, as the Christian Bible announces, so much "foolishness with God." The more Noren ransacked the whole store of his learning and intellectual faculty the more convinced he became that he had only used a meaningless word. Thus the educated Vivekananda came to feel himself vanquished before the illiterate Ramakrishna, and never again in his life did he use the word, blind faith.

Slowly but surely Noren came to understand that, it is not knowledge but realisation which is true religion. The heart must be developed. Man must *see* God. Thinking of reality is good ; but better is the vision of the same. It took time and much loving patience. But in the end Noren discovered that Sri Ramakrishna's teaching was the eloquent silence of insight. Thereupon he determined that he, too, should first of all possess insight. Having that, verily, he could then *thunder* truth to the peoples of the earth. He could then become the eloquent utterance of that grand silence of insight which was of the soul of the Master.

Often, often, during conversation when the disciples were sitting round him, Sri Ramakrishna would burst into some heart-stirring utterance. Then the devotees would soar, beyond the commonplaceness of mere thought, into that silence which is the sensing of reality. At other times he would leave the disciples to themselves and to their argumentative moods. The discussion ended, they would find him in the deepest Samâdhi. This, they came to know after a time, was a silent and yet eloquent protest to their heated discussion. Sri Ramakrishna was a man who loved and sought for the

core of things. He was not content with eloquent words. He demanded, "What do you *know*? What have you *realised*?" At times he would place his foot upon one who was arguing with Noren. From that moment, for some reason or other, the intellect of Noren would wane before the sudden increase in the intellectual radiance of the other disciple.

All through his life Noren held in mind this attitude of his Master as a *guru* in dealing with those who became his own personal disciples. He made realisation the sole burden of his message. He accorded personal freedom to all. He never dogmatised. Indeed, he never even organised. Even as he saw in his own *guru* that realisation was the real transfiguration of personality, even so did his own disciples see in their time the self-same greatness in him. And this was because he had sat at the Feet of Sri Ramakrishna.

The most eloquent and convincing power in all the methods of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings was the spiritual radiance of his personal life. His character was the power behind his teaching. The man who preached universal love, proved it in conduct. Once, in the earlier days of his *sādhana*s having gone into Samādhi through some intense overflow of feeling, his body fell upon some live charcoal. Smelling the odour of burning flesh, some people ran to his aid. But one who envied the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna and his influence over Mathoor Babu and the Rani Rasmoni, had come first upon the scene. Seeing the opportunity, he kicked the prostrate saint with violence a repeated number of times. The force of concentration having been partially exhausted, the Master had returned to sense consciousness for a time to become aware of this action. He could have told Mathoor Babu, the son-in-law of Rani Rasmoni, the founder of the Temple. Both were his disciples. Both believed him possessed of divine powers; and had they known this or heard of it, they would have dealt terribly with the offender. Not until the death of his great benefactors did the blessed Master tell this tale.

He never preached against caste. He was a Brāhmana, yet he showed his great love for the outcast millions who were lowest in the social scale ; and he also revealed his sense of utmost humility before his Mother by performing the most menial of all services, which even the lowest of the outcasts, the chandalas and pariahs, would shrink from doing. To take away the last semblance of the pride of Brāhmana birth, and to gain a sense of oneness with the lowest of the low, he cleansed the filthiest places with the long hair of his head, sometime during those old days when he was practising hard austerities to get rid of the idea of *Aham* or egoism. Some may say, "It was madness." But those who have ever felt the great pressure of the Spirit upon human personality, know what a burning passion to realise the highest truth can drive one in order to subject one's self to the extremest form of discipline. He came out triumphant ; all caste distinction vanished from him. An overwhelming sense of the all-pervading Reality and presence of the Most High came upon the Master. The universe became "heaven" to him. There was no longer any sense of defilement ; there was neither high nor low. It was all Brahman. What was caste to him when he had seen God ! He was as the forest-fire which burns to ashes even the mightiest trees before it. He did not disregard caste as an institution, but he soared, beyond all institutions, into the very presence and beatitude of the Divine Mother. Aye, he became the Mother. As the self-same moon is visible everywhere, even so was the self-same divinity of all visible to this arch-Rishi.

What were Sri Ramakrishna's answers to questions pertaining to God-vision and methods of realisation ? How to pray ? "Pray in any form," he would say, "for the Lord hears the foot-fall even of an ant." How to find God ? "By the conquest of *Kāmini-Kāanchana*." What is vision and what is character ? "They are the obverse and the reverse of the same coin." Sincerity was the main theme in his teaching. Without sincerity nothing is possible ; with sincerity all is possible. And he would tell the story of the *guru* who, in

order to illustrate the intensity of sincerity a man should have to see God, took his disciple to the river and then, holding him beneath the waters until he begged to be released for his very life, said, "When you desire spirituality and God as much as a drowning man desires to be saved from certain death, you will attain the goal." God is the goal ; even the least sincerity will bring results. And he would say to Noren and the rest that if they but followed one sixteenth of the full complement of the teaching he had given them, they would surely reach the goal.

Is God Personal or Impersonal? "He is both," said Sri Ramakrishna, "and yet He is beyond." He is manifold personality ; He is the Gods. He is Brahman. But, beyond any intellectual or theological dogmas, He is manifest in the soul's own inmost realisation. He is the soul Self-revealed. He is the Soul ; He is Infinite. He is all Realisation. He is All in All in the vision of the devotee. He assumes any form for the pleasure of His devotee. For God is the manifestation of the Soul to itself, and the forms of that manifestation may be as infinite in number as there are degrees in the sincerity with which the goal is desired and the ideal cherished and known. He is beyond speech and beyond thought ; for when the devotee enters the realm of realisation, what words are there to describe that condition of Being ! The mind is incapable of conceiving that glorious Existence. Only the soul can know. He is the Inexpressible ; and inexpressible is the vision of Him. Silence is His name. He is not to be put between the covers of a book, as the Master had told Noren, and as Noren told thousands of persons when he became the Swami Vivekananda. God cannot be defined by words ; He is to be realised. When the tongue speaks let it always speak the language of reality and realisation. Is Image-worship right or not right ? Sri Ramakrishna said that all such were idle questions. Worship of anything is true which helps one to see God. "Intense longing is the one thing needful."

Such was the method of the teaching and also its sub-

stance. Realisation and sincerity, sincerity and realisation, struggle and spiritual exercises,—these are the means. What is in a name or what in a form ! All religions are one ; all paths are paths to the same goal. Earnestness is the basis of all religious consciousness and realisation,—earnestness and the conquest over *Kâmini-Kâanchana*. Sri Ramakrishna's teaching was set in the convincing language of insight ; and his teaching and his method of teaching and his realisation were one, because he as a teacher was a man of realisation, because his methods were full of spiritual fire, simplicity, and practicality. And because his teachings were the enunciation of actual vision did Noren, as the Swami Vivekananda, become an irrepressible torrent of spiritual inspiration, the embodiment of realisation, and the Prophet of the Modern Gospel.



XLII

INITIATION INTO ADVAITA VEDANTA.

The general teaching which Sri Ramakrishna imparted to his disciples, Noren assimilated in a particular way. He was the readiest amongst them all in arriving at the true spirit. His soul was most attuned to those spiritual vibrations which the Master's words his spiritual characteristics gave out. Thus he read volumes where others read only pages of that Revelation unto men which was the Life and Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. He paused to *study* and observe the qualities of the Master. He did not simply accept whatever the Master gave forth in teaching ; he made it his very own. The thoughts and words of Sri Ramakrishna spread like spiritual fire through Noren's whole personality. While he ate, while he studied, in conversing, in going through spiritual exercises, and even in dreams the larger personality of his Master was dominant.

For it was a study that was set before him, a very complex study, one which occupied his whole mind. It was nothing less than the science of the spiritual consciousness, of which his Master's life and teaching were the incontrovertible elements of reality and test. It must be constantly kept in consideration that the whole gist of the Master's personality and teaching was the very Hinduism of Hinduism. It was not a sectarian Hinduism, but that wide and eclectic attitude of the soul which has been, in a marked degree, a Hindu racial possession at all times. On the surface it appears as a rigidity of ceremonial form and as a congeries of unbelievable myths. But with the background of the Advaita Vedanta philosophy, the whole setting and the details are seen in an altogether different light. The mythological character embodies the ideals and the methods for the spiritual transfiguration of personality. The mythological God is

seen as the manifestation of a sublime ideal reality. The ceremonial forms are recognised as methods for the concentration of the mind upon the Most High.

Noren, when he had become a Brahmo, denounced worship and the gods. He was estranged from Hinduism, but then, he had never made a scientific study of it, nor of the philosophical ideals upon which it was based. He was too young ; and Hinduism is venerable with age and deepest realisations. The first awakening of his mind was based on superficial generalisations. He was struck with the appearance of Western culture and with the plausible suitableness of Brahmo theology, tintured, as it was, with Western theological ideals. When he had come to Sri Ramakrishna he was, therefore, a believer in a Personal God. He was a Theist or Deist. He had, consequently, not in his possession that master-key and passport to the understanding of Hinduism, which is, the personal realisation of the conception of the all-inclusive and superpersonal existence which the Vedas have called Brahman. He thought of God as possessed of all the pleasing qualities only, and that all the evil in this world was due to the inscrutable wisdom of Providence.

When he came to Sri Ramakrishna, however, he found an altogether new theology. True, it was the same theology which he had been taught from his infancy, but he was now approaching it with understanding, whereas, as a child, he had imbibed it without *reason*, simply as a matter of custom and heredity. Formerly when the intellect aroused itself, doubt also arose ; but now a new order of thought, a new outlook was being born. And Noren, entering a world of deeper perceptions, found the very highest truth within the boundaries of his early belief. And how ? The very life of Sri Ramakrishna revealed to him potentialities and realities in Hinduism he had never dreamed of. The Hinduism of Sri Ramakrishna was a positive, practical, and living realisation. However Noren might question the actuality of the spiritual ideals and gods with which Hinduism abounds, he could not

doubt the earnestness of his Master. Sri Ramakrishna injected a living spirit into Hinduism. It might be superstition, thought Noren at first ; the Master himself might be a madman, but it must be a remarkable superstition by which this madman transmitted spirituality even by one touch ! It breathed forth flames of reality and great visions of truth. It was alive ; it moulded life ; it spelled realisation, at least to Sri Ramakrishna himself. And, in this, how superior was it, thought Noren, to the theologically healthy but spiritually lifeless body of Brahmoism ! At least, for him, Brahmoism did not emanate a burning and contagious spirituality. Yes, it was more of a social reform movement, even though the members, considered individually, might be possessed of great spiritual aspiration. And then, what struck Noren as to the superiority of the Hinduism of the Master was, that Keshub Chandra Sen, the leading spirit in the Brahmo movement, himself came and sat at the Feet of Sri Ramakrishna, aye, not alone that, but actually worshipped him with worship bordering on the divine.

During his relationship with Sri Ramakrishna Noren gradually came to believe in Kali, though after a long and severe struggle, as the personification of a spiritual Power impersonal in its function, and impervious as well to the joy or pain it arouses. He grew aware of the Mother in Her various Forms as the personification of the Power which works through the darkness of all relative good and evil and all relative joy and pain to draw out the light, strength, blessedness and self-stability of the soul. Kali is the Power which pushes the mind through all forms of distraction, desire and doubt, in order that the soul may transcend the ideal of the body and that, going beyond the blinking lights of sense and thought, it may enter into the effulgence of that Reality which is Shiva, whose Self-impelled manifestation is the Mother. She is the *Shakti*, the Power which destroys all illusion and leads the soul, through all vanity and variety of experience, into the Shiva-consciousness of Pure Divinity. This understanding was a process. Noren came by it in watching his

Master in religious worship, in religious teaching and in religious ecstasy. The spirit of this understanding was communicated to Noren in spite of himself. Whenever the Master spoke or felt he invariably made Noren the audience, though many others might be present. He *injected* his own consciousness, his own personal realisation of the Mother and of Hinduism into the soul of Noren. How he did this is not fully known. The process was purely spiritual, and too subtle to be explained. Noren would frequently feel *shocks* of spiritual consciousness, if such a term may be used. Times were, when in the presence of the Master, his soul would witness great floods of feeling well up within him and carry him into spheres of ecstasy. He could not contain himself. Such would be the *power* and the *blessedness* he felt. Then he would sing, sing, sing, and pour out his whole soul in the singing. His voice would thrill those who heard. Tremendous spiritual vibrations would be set up. The Master's room would be alive with Presence. The Master himself would experience repeated Samâdhi. Or it would be the silence and peace of meditation in which Noren would make long and deep plunges.

It was this *fire* of soul, and not mere thinking, that literally lifted Noren into Hinduism. At times, he felt as if Dakshineswar was the spiritual centre of the universe. He would have such great reachings-out of his soul that the Master became as the embodiment of God to him. It must always be remembered that thought was only incidental in Noren's realisation. It was feeling, greatness of spiritual feeling and great swellings in intensity of the spiritual consciousness which compelled him to accept Hinduism and Sri Ramakrishna. His intellectual consciousness of Hinduism arose by sheer power of the soul within him. He would find himself uttering the words "Kâli ! Kâli !" with all his heart. Then the mind would suddenly start, "What is this ? Who is Kâli ? Rubbish !" But a moment later the heart of him would regain its self-possession, and it would be, "Jay Mâ Kâli ! Jay Mâ Kâli !" Unspeakably strange are the cross-

comings of various personal tendencies. The doubting Noren was passing away ; the devotional Noren, the spiritual Noren, —Noren, the Hindu,—was being born. Every now and then, however, the last outbursts of the doubting mind would rise, as if in final effort to assert itself. But in the end the heart would triumph ; the heart would always triumph.

In this transitional period, however, Noren once thought of giving up the religious life. He suffered physically and mentally from want of food and from much domestic worry. A severe pain in the head became chronic with him. It was getting worse and worse. Noren remained away from Dakshineswar for some days. Sri Ramakrishna soon visited Calcutta. Coming to the house of a disciple, the Master sent for Noren, as was his wont. He came. His condition was very distracted. His head reeled with pain. Sri Ramakrishna saw the situation immediately. Whatever the trouble was, it was instantly relieved. For Sri Ramakrishna stretching out his hand, touched the head of his favourite disciple and, —the wonder of it—Noren was cured then and there !

At this time the domestic afflictions from which Noren suffered were overwhelming. His father's death, the terrible poverty of the family, a grief-laden mother, helpless brothers and sisters,—all these were too much for him. He again thought of fleeing from it all. But something called him to Dakshineswar. He ran thither. He fell at the Feet of the Master ; and the Master sent him to the Temple of the Mother to pray for subsistence. He went. Only his own soul knows what transpired there. He came back to the Master. "What did you pray for?" asked the Master. And Noren, overcome with a trembling joy and a holy fear, said, "I could only pray for Bhakti and Jnanam, Love and Knowledge." The Master said, "Go again, my son !" And Noren again went. He returned as before and with the same answer to his Master's query. And then Sri Ramakrishna for the third time sent Noren saying, "Go ! Pray to Mother !" For the third time Noren went. And in the presence of the Mother he again asked for Love and Knowledge, although he had

come to pray for relief from domestic affliction. And then—who knows what actually transpired ! Noren never spoke of it except in a vague way. But certain it was that he had the Vision of the Mother, and She literally made him Her own Child, Her Slave. So, at least he said in a passing way, in later years, to one of his disciples, "She made me Her slave." When he emerged from the Temple he was inspiring to look upon ; he *was* the saint. And the Master told others that Mother would provide for the bare necessities of the family thenceforth,—and so it came to pass.

His constant experience with Sri Ramakrishna was that of a soul communing with another soul. Flashes of divinity were revealed throughout. There were whisperings of reality at every step ; and, here and there, the whisperings became strong voices, the burden of whose message was, "Renounce ! Renounce !"

The crown of all experience was his initiation into the Advaita Vedanta, the synthesis and background of all Hinduism. And this was brought about in subtle ways, showing how wonderful as a teacher was Bhagavan Sri Ramakrishna, showing, also, how gentle and how loving and, withal, how patient he was. Noren said, "It is blasphemy !" when Sri Ramakrishna first spoke to him of the doctrine of "*Shivoham ! Shivoham !*" "I am God ! I am God !" realised in the most exalted state of transcendent knowledge, called the Nirvikalpa-Samâdhi. As a Brahmo, Noren had thought of God as one reality and the soul as another. To say that these were one and the same was blasphemy, he thought. He dwelt at that time in a limited theological world, having vague ideas of physical relationship with a formless spiritual reality. When Sri Ramakrishna told him of the Supreme Wisdom of the Vedanta, that the soul itself was God, he was horrified. He would not see ; he would not try to see. "It is untrue ; it is a terrible blasphemy !" he would say with bated breath.

It was the living experience he had with his Master that convinced him anew. The Master would give utterance to

those world-transcending feelings of reality, when he knew his own soul as of the same waters as the Ocean of God-Consciousness ; and in rapture he would give expression to the thought of "*Brahmāsmi ! Brahmāsmi !*" "I am Brahman ! I am Brahman !" and would enter such an exalted state of being that all sense of personality was utterly lost, and the divinity alone shone forth.

Sri Ramakrishna would ask Noren to read those Scriptures which treat solely of Brahman the Absolute. He did not ask the other disciples to do this. Theirs was a different path. Theirs was the path of Bhakti or Love for God. But Sri Ramakrishna saw that his was the path of Jnana, or Transcendental Insight. His main message was to be that of the incomparable glory of the Vedanta. Noren, however, would refuse to read them. The Master would say, "Well, Noren ! Then do just read a little of them to me. I desire to hear them. You need not pay any attention to the text." Yes, in that sense he would read them to the Master. Many were the times when the Master pleaded thus ; many were the times when the disciple read ; and in the reading, the ideas would burn into his soul. He lost himself in the reading. Thus the Yogavasishtha, the Adhyatma Ramayana, and some of the important Upanishads were read by Noren either in the presence of the Master or by himself.

"All this is Brahman ; what is perceived and what is not perceived ; what is known, and what is not known ; these heaven-worlds, this mortal life, the Vedas and what are not the Vedas, the beginning and what is not the beginning, all this is Brahman ! The soul is Brahman ; the Gods are Brahman ; the universe is Brahman ; truth is Brahman, and all is Brahman ! There is nothing but Brahman. Whoso realises this, verily attains unto the Highest. He is freed from the deceptions of the senses and the intellect. He sees nothing but Brahman. To him Brahman has become all in all. As a snake throws off its old skin, so does he throw off all limitations and himself become the Shining One ! He himself becomes Brahman !" Such is the spirit and the text of the

Upanishads, and as Noren read sublime ideas like these, his soul would soar and soar like a great eagle above the pettiness and the commonplaceness of this world. And the soul of Sri Ramakrishna would soar higher and higher, beyond the confines of even the highest spiritual limitations. It would go beyond and beyond and Beyond, until his body would become rigid in spiritual ecstasy, and all thought was left behind and all sense-consciousness dimmed by the glory of that indescribable Effulgence of the Absolute Brahman, which only they can know who have been utterly drowned to all objective life, and from whom all form, thought and personality have dropped off. And Sri Ramakrishna entering this condition of being became a living God, became one with Brahman. What were the Upanishads but the utterance of that consciousness into which he had soared. Such was Noren's training at the Feet of the Master. And Noren breathed in the pureness of that air, feeling the Freedom of the Infinite in the great depths of spiritual emotion. "*Shivoham ! Shivoham !*" "Brahman is real ; Brahman alone is real ; the world is a myth. And verily the soul itself is Brahman !" — thus rang the note in his soul.

Noren saw in the life of Sri Ramakrishna the full meaning and the ripe blossoming-forth of all that the Upanishads taught. The example of the Master, his own eagerness as a disciple, his own great power in the spiritual faculty of understanding,—these were the factors in that making up of thought and insight which later burst forth, for him, into the blessedness of the highest Advaita realisation. Aye, he attained that state himself where all is Brahman. And this was the greatest event in all his life. All other realisations and events led up to and were afterwards tributary to this. He came to accept all the Gods, and "I believe in Brahman and the Gods" was his luminous declaration.

In him who became the Crown of the Vedanta, who became the Spirit Incarnate of the Advaita Vedanta and the Living Utterance of the Upanishads, whose message was to stir the world,—verily, in him, the Paramahansa Ramakrishna,

he saw the Effulgence of Brahman. Verily, he saw it as his own Soul. Verily he saw this in the Nirvikalpa Samādhi, which is the Awareness of the Infinite Consciousness and the Seeing of the Infinite Vision.

Such was the training of Noren. Little by little he was lifted out of doubt into beatitude, out of darkness into effulgence, out of anguish of mind and heart into blessedness and bliss, out of the seething vortex of the world into the Grand Expanse of the World of Realisation. He was taken, little by little, and by the power of Sri Ramakrishna, out of bondage into Infinite Freedom. He was taken from out the pale of a little learning into that Omniscience which is the Consciousness of Brahman. He was lifted out of all objective conceptions of the Godhead into the glorious awareness of the subjective nature of True Being, above form, above thought, above sense, above all relative good and evil, into the Sameness and Reality and the Absolute-Beyondness of Brahman. And the scene of such transposition of his personality was the Garden of Cossipur, and the time of the occurrence, the immediate future.



XLIII

ON THE LOOM OF DISCIPLESHIP.

Indeed, to Sri Ramakrishna Noren was indebted for his entire education into Hinduism ; and oftentimes it was a question of infinite patience and long-suffering on the part of the Master because of his chief disciple often openly rebelling against him. On every point there was dissension, the Master always loving, the disciple always gloriously militant. Noren was as if deliberately blind, and the Master literally *made* him see. That his intense personality ever became subordinated to the vision of Sri Ramakrishna, showed in a thousandfold manner the incomparable greatness of the Man of God. Indeed, the Master was an Aristotle of Hinduism concealed under the guise of an emotional Bhakta. He was Chaitanya and Sankaracharya in one ; and Noren gradually came to recognise this more and more. Verily, his whole life was a constant education into this consciousness. In every detail of their relationship Noren was as the throbbing darkness, and the Bhagavan the Light scattering the darkness. Noren, representing the spirit of Modern India, sat at the Feet of his Master to learn the greatness of the Indian Past. The Old India of the Master was straightening out in his disciple the rebellious and precocious intellect of Modern India. All the spiritual unrest and religious tumult and all the doubt and intellectual license of the age, were as if concentrated in Noren before the Man of Dakshineswar. In the end the Master was triumphant. And in the last days of his incarnation, with his body dying, the Master felt that his purpose had been accomplished. And thus on one of these days, being too ill to speak he made signs by which to say, "Noren now understands everything. He has accepted all. Now he is the Son of the Mother, a Bhakta of Radha-Krishna, a devotee of Sita-Rama, and withal an out-and-out

Advaitin, a meditator on the Formless Brahman." In short, the young man who had come to him as a Brahmo had been converted into a Hindu, thus illustrating the epoch-making and vastly intellectual influence of a life of Supreme Realisation, for the boy whom he was training was in time to carry the Gospel of Hinduism to the farthest shores of the world and preach it with a mighty voice in the land of Hindusthan itself.

There were certain moments, however, when Noren had revealed a tendency to fanaticism in his intellectual convictions. Sometimes he became bigoted in his remarks. Sri Ramakrishna would then admonish him, saying, "My boy, see Truth from all angles and through every perspective. My whole life has been a training in all-sidedness. Gain this same consciousness. Be a Jnani and a Bhakta in one." This trait in Noren was eventually obliterated by his realisation of the oneness of all spiritual endeavour and all righteous belief ; but for a time there is no doubt that he irritated Sri Ramakrishna with his ignorant criticisms of Kali and with his stubborn doubting of the authority of such as had seen the Mother. The Master felt it not so much a personal attack upon himself as upon the whole body of truth, for where he himself was concerned he invited criticism. But there were occasions when Sri Ramakrishna would become impatient at the "reasoning in a circle" which Noren sometimes did before him. One day the Master could bear the sharp criticisms of his disciple no longer. The strain was too much. He said, "Get out ! Don't come here any more ! What is all your prattling in the face of men who have seen God !" Noren walked out silently from the room. For some minutes he did not return ; he felt ashamed. Then suddenly love and remorse took possession of his heart and he came to the Master in an act of service. The Master seeing this embraced him and forgave him at once ; in his heart he knew that Noren was only outspoken and that sincerity, which he loved so much, was the very essence of his nature. Noren realised on that day that he had allowed himself to go too

far, and had thrown aspersion upon the spiritual realisation of the Master and his devotees. But the love between himself and his Master was overwhelming, for no matter what Noren said or what Noren did, Sri Ramakrishna loved him.

But how long was the training and how exceptional the method ! It has already been seen how Noren fought the Mother ; verily, there was no single Hindu ideal which he did not violently antagonise. Whosoever Sri Ramakrishna would speak of Radha and Krishna in those days, Noren's whole personality would turn ; he thought the whole relationship of the Avatāra to Radha immoral and objectionable. Did Sri Ramakrishna speak of Them he would leave the room at once. Then the Master, interrupting his conversation with the others, would go in pursuit of his disciple, catching him by the arm and entreating him to come and sit down, with the words, "Why not fix your mind only on the great and intense yearning of Radha and the Gopis for That which is the Supreme ? Why dwell on the expression ? After all that may appear human to you, but you must take the *yearning* and the vision as divine." And Noren, rather unwillingly, would sit down and his brain would gather the ideas, even in spite of himself. Sri Ramakrishna knew that his ideas would finally alter the whole personality of his chief disciple. He was glad in his heart that Noren was a rebel, for without the intellectual strain and struggle and without the illumination which comes thereof, he instinctively knew that his Norendra would not be able later on to do his work of helping the souls of others by solving their difficulties in the spiritual path and in the understanding and acceptance of Hinduism. Thus the complete revolution of thought which Noren underwent, revealed the luminous greatness of the Master. Indeed, from all points of view, the difficulties of Noren, his whole struggle and gradual realisation, prove more than any other fact the supra-Pandit learning of Sri Ramakrishna, revealing him as the living incarnation of Hinduism.

In keeping with the Master's own desire, Noren frequent-

ly made tests of his realisation. Sri Ramakrishna had said to him, "Test me as the money-changers test their silver coins. Your path is not to accept me until you have tested me." And accordingly one day whilst the Master was absent from Dakshineswar, having gone to the city of Calcutta, Noren came to the Temple-gardens and found the living-room of Sri Ramakrishna empty. Not even one person was present. Noren had with him a silver rupee. The thought of the Master's *tapasyā* concerning money came suddenly to his mind. "Let me test him," thought the disciple, and taking the coin he put it in the bed of the Master, beneath the mattress. Then he went to meditate in the shadow of the *Panchavati*. Soon Sri Ramakrishna returned. Coming into his room he went to sit upon the bed; directly his feet approached it he felt suddenly a contracting pain in his body and his feet were thrown backwards as if having come into contact with fire! The Master called out in a surprised tone, "What is the matter! What is the matter!" Noren had come into the room when the Master returned from Calcutta. Various emotions came over him when he saw the Master's body thus violently contracted—tenderness and love for him, pain at his physical agony, and a joyous blessedness that the test had come true. An attendant at once searched the bed, pulling off the coverings in his great haste, fearing that perhaps a viper had concealed itself therein. Then as the bedding dropped to the floor the muffled ring of a coin was heard. "A rupee! How could it have got there!" cried the attendant. "What!" said the Master. Noren had walked away from the room. In his heart Sri Ramakrishna knew by reading the face of Noren all that had passed through his mind, and his soul was glad, and his love showed itself all the more towards him.

Verily, Sri Ramakrishna was a most remarkable personality. In certain high stages of his insight into the Advaita, and following upon repeated oncomings of the higher spiritual consciousness, his body became, to his mind saturated with transcendent ideas, even as clay within the

potter's hands. Indeed, he often spoke of himself to the effect that the natural state of his being was that of super-consciousness and that he had frequently to force himself down to the state of normal consciousness in order that he might be able to teach others how to live a godly life. Addressing his disciples, he would say, "Your natural state is that of human consciousness ; mine tends constantly to that of Samâdhi. I have hard work to keep my mind in this plane." His sympathetic nervous system had become so charged with impressions of the Advaita consciousness that it acted, one might say, even as a separate personality, with instincts of a marvellous order, showing his body to have become one with his soul. For on many occasions, going to the Ganges side, he would take water in his hands wherewith to offer worship to the Gods, when, lo, the hands would be wrung instantly out of shape, and the water fall into the stream,—and this was when he was normally conscious ! Or, going to the temple of Shiva he would be about to worship, when a like thing would happen, and the flower would fall to the pavement of the shrine. These phenomena made an indelible impression on the minds of all the devotees ; for here they saw the living illustration of the truth declared in the Gita that, when a man has reached the highest state, the God-state, all his Karma ends in knowledge. He can no longer worship. In the case of Sri Ramakrishna this was literally true. Even when he was the temple-priest he was often found in the deepest Samâdhi, with the worship utensils about him and the flowers wherewith to worship the Divinity upon his own head ! Never was there a man who could throw himself, as the Master could, into any stage or field of consciousness or into any embodiment of ideas. In the course of a day he would become Mohammedan or Vaishnavite, Shaivaite or a Shâkta, a Buddhist or a Christian, or an Advaitin as the case might be. But how intense was the training ! Had he not gone to extremes to realise the spiritual consciousness of each of them. To him all religions were methods whose unity lay in their one purpose, and that,

realisation. Aye, so long had he meditated on each ideal that he had the vision of Christ and other *Avatâras* as entering into himself. And the Advaita consciousness came constantly upon him, both in the objective sense that all religions are one and in the subjective sense that all this is Brahman. And so filled with the idea of taking no thought for the morrow was he that, when someone hearing that he was suffering great pain gave him three pills of opium, each the fourth part of a mustard seed, to take three days consecutively for cure, his personality became seriously confused and he lost his way, walking into thorns and brushes, on the road from Jadu Mullick's garden to the Temple at Dakshineswar. He was conscious, but he seemed to have lost command over his limbs and sight. He called as a child to Hriday, saying, "What is the trouble, Hriday, what is the trouble ! Why cannot I find the path !" And then remembering that he had the opium pills tied in a knot in the corner of his *dhooti*, he cried out, "O yes ! O yes ! Here are the pills for three days which Jadu Mullick gave me." And opening the knot in his cloth he threw the medicine to the ground. Instantly his feet found the way ! So charged with spiritual ideas was the subconscious mind that, even against the knowledge of his normal consciousness, they had control over the sensory and motor nerves. Indeed, the very depth of his consciousness was God ; and the surface consciousness was a manifestation of the glories of the soul for the good of the world.

Living in this constant atmosphere of blessedness and realisation it was natural that Noren should develop the spiritual faculties with marvellous rapidity. His training was ten thousand times that of the ordinary *shishya*. He rapidly assimilated the states of his Master's consciousness, at least in their spiritual definition, and grew a giant in soul. And his regard for Sri Ramakrishna knew no bounds. He himself might fight with the Master, but to others he spoke always with the deepest respect for him, and if anyone questioned the divine realisations of the Bhagavan he would challenge him at once to prove his assertions. For example, when the Master

had been removed from Dakshineswar to the Shyampukur house in Calcutta before being finally taken to the Garden at Cossipur, a certain physician of fame often came to attend him. He did not accept Sri Ramakrishna in the same sense as the devotees, and one day entering into a discussion with them, he insisted even before the Master, that as all men were equal they should not take the dust of Sri Ramakrishna's feet and make of him a God ; and therewith to force his point home he took the dust of the feet, not only of Sri Ramakrishna but of the others as well. Noren defending their position said, "Sir, we look upon the Master as a Person who is *like* God. Let me make my idea clear to you. There is a point somewhere between the vegetable and animal creation where it is difficult to say whether a particular thing is an animal or a plant. Much in the same way there is a point somewhere between the man-world and the God-world where one cannot say with certainty whether a person is human or divine." He ended by saying, "We look upon him not as God but as a God-like person. And hence we offer him worship bordering on Divine worship." Of course, later on as the Swami Vivekananda, he went even further in his declarations concerning the personality of Sri Ramakrishna, when he had come to understand him all the deeper.

The exchange of understanding between the Master and his chief disciple was gradually growing deeper, and the Master had already made repeated assertions as to Noren's inherent greatness. Speaking at Balaram Babu's house which he often visited, he said to his Bhaktas, "Go and invite Norendra and Rakhal, and the others,"—mentioning the names of a few other young disciples. "Offering food to them is the same thing as offering food to Narayana Himself. These are not ordinary men. They are parts of the Divine Nature manifest in the flesh." And of these parts of the Divine Nature he regarded Norendra as the head. On another occasion the Master said concerning Norendra, "He is one of the *Saptarshis*." And the *Saptarshis* are the seven greatest *Mahāpurushas*, immortalised in Hindu mythology

as the Seven Stars of the *ursa major* constellation. Again he would say, "Aye, Norendra is the Nara of the Twin Rishis, Nara-Narayana."

In those days Noren in common with many Brahmos feared for the psychical consequences of intense meditation, and too much inebriation in the love of God. Sri Ramakrishna quieted him on this point, saying, "God is like a sea of liquid sweet. Would you not dive into this sea? Suppose, my boy, there is a vessel with a wide mouth containing the syrup of sugar, and suppose you are a fly anxious to drink of the sweet fluid. How would you like to drink of it?" Norendra said to him in reply, that he would like to sit and drink from the edge of the vessel, adding that if he chanced to fall to a point beyond his depth he was sure to be drowned and thus lose his life. Thereupon the Master said to him, "You forget, my boy, that if you dive deep into the Divine Sea, you will not be afraid of death or of any danger. Remember,—the Divine Sea is the Sea of Immortality. It never causes death, but gives Life Everlasting. Be not afraid like some foolish persons that you may run to excess in your love for God." And Noren followed this advice in his life. His intellect may have questioned, but his heart went straight to the goal.

At this time, strange experiences came to him. Several times he saw Sri Ramakrishna in the vision of his meditation when he himself was at home and the Master in distant Dakshineswar. But he said nothing of this until one day when one of the other devotees said in the presence of the Master, "I saw Sri Ramakrishna when I was at Dacca, *touching* him." Noren said in astonishment, "I have also seen him many times in that way. So how can I doubt your words!"

One day when things were at their worst at home Noren came to the Master for relief. He was at the time trying his best to have his home affairs settled somehow once for all, so that he might be free to lead the life of renunciation. "Sri Ramakrishna knew all this and was anxious for him. He spoke earnestly of complete renunciation, directing his re-

marks to his chief disciple, in particular. Noren broke down under the piercing words of the Master who urged him to final renunciation, at all costs, without thought for the morrow. For some moments Noren was lost in grief; then suddenly sitting up erect, he sang wondrous songs breathing the spirit of renunciation, so that even the Master was touched. Soon after Noren had made in his mind a vow of complete non-attachment, living detached in matters of the world, performing his duties, but with his heart devoted to one ideal—Realisation through Renunciation.

In the days of Cossipur-Garden Noren was full of yearning for the Realisation of Truth. Intense *Vairāgyam* was blazing in his heart, making him feel feverish with restlessness. He expressed to Sri Ramakrishna his resolution of practising *Sadhana*s under the *Panchavati* and the *Vilva* tree in the Dakshineswar Garden. The Master was delighted at heart and looking at him with overpowering affection asked, "Won't you continue your college studies?" Noren replied with visible emotion, "Sir, I shall feel relieved if I can get a medicine by taking which I may forget, for all time, all that I have learnt." He practised many austerities and much meditation at this time, spending often many nights away from the Cossipur house, before a *Dhuni* under the *Panchavati* or the *Vilva* tree in Dakshineswar Garden. On many occasions he saw a triangular effulgence of light, *Jyoti*, which Sri Ramakrishna interpreted to him as the Seat of the Seed of Brahman. He had also visions of the Forms of Gods and Goddesses. He gradually came to outgrow fear and mental restlessness as the result of his religious austerities, for his realisations were of such a nature that they exalted him. He learned how to keep his mind well poised, himself becoming the witness to all states, remaining unaffected by them.

Norendra once longed to be lost in *bhāva*, or the ecstatic state of Dualistic vision of the Divinity, forgetful of outer things. He saw how the devotees of the Master, such as Gopal and Monmohan, would fall seemingly lifeless to

the ground at the chanting together of the Names of God in the enthusiasm of the *sankirtana* and would seem to be seeing and enjoying God. He was much depressed that he was unable to enter these same states of blessedness in a like manner, and he complained to Sri Ramakrishna, saying, "Master, all these are blessed with these supersensuous states. At the Name of God they are overwhelmed with feeling and pass into *bhāva*, while I remain comparatively unaffected. I have gained nothing ; though I have practised so much *Sadhana* still these states remain always foreign to me ! The Master regarding him with great tenderness replied, "My child, be not disturbed. What does it matter ? When a huge elephant runs into a pond, it sets up a great commotion in it ; but if it goes into the waters of the Ganges, little commotion is set up. These devotees are, as it were, small ponds. A little of this Great Power of Divine Love coming into the enclosure of these small pools lashes the waters into a fury. You are a huge river. The Elephant of Divine Love makes only a small ripple on the vast waters of your soul." And he bade his chief disciple to be patient, for the time would come when his whole personality would burst all limitations and plunge into That Which is Infinite Beatitude.

On one of these days in Balaram Babu's house, Sri Ramakrishna asked Norendra to put his hand into his own. He did so. Strange to say, after a few moments he felt as if something from the person of the Master were entering into him, and he experienced a thrill of divine ecstasy pass through his entire body ; it was as if a great blessing and power had descended upon him. Some time after, he was relating this incident to a friend in English. Sri Ramakrishna hearing him speak said, "O you are talking of that incident ! Thank you ! Thank you !" mentioning the affair. He knew only half a dozen words or so in English, such as "Thank you," which he would say in such a sweet and endearing way, that every one would be charmed. But his soul knew the contents of the mind of all of his disciples, even though they spoke in foreign tongues.

In the early days of his coming to Dakshineswar Noren often brought with him certain of his friends whom he begged the Master to accept as his disciples. But he would not even speak to them. Noren remonstrated, "If you are a great saint and teacher, surely you should help them even if they are wicked." But he only replied, "O my boy, Mother shows me that they are immersed in worldliness. They want the pleasures and joys of the life of the senses. Their time is not come yet. Let them *grow*. They must *work* their way out ! And they have a long way to go !" Noren only became convinced of the wisdom of the Master's words, long, long after.

During these days there was an occasion when the Advaita consciousness rose to its full height, and Noren said in the hearing of the devotees and even of the Master himself, "The scheme of the universe is devilish. I myself could have created a better world. I am giving no scheme of the universe, but simply my opinion of the present scheme. But if we have the faith that ALL IS GOD, that I MYSELF am doing everything, that I MYSELF am responsible for my own fate and my own condition of being and for my birth and my death, then all is right. There is only one way out of all this misery, there is only one refuge and that is to superimpose GOD upon the universe and upon all things, or better still, to become conscious *only* of God. The only way is to realise GOD as the SOUL ITSELF. I am Thou, and Thou art I." And then as a sublime and beautiful protest against the scheme of things and against the whole universe of manifoldness and appearance, his soul burst forth in the chanting of that grand hymn known as the "Six Stanzas on Nirvana" by the Acharya Sankara, each of which ends with the inspiring words and the Brahman-stirring consciousness, "I am Existence Absolute, Knowledge Absolute, Bliss Absolute ! I am Shiva ! I am Shiva !"

Sri Ramakrishna would often relate his reminiscences of Norendra to the disciples. Speaking of the first occasion when he saw him, he would say, "When Norendra first came

here, he had on a dirty-looking *chaddar* and a pair of old slippers, but seeing his face and eyes I knew at once that he had *something* within." The Master had realised immediately that Noren was a lad of invaluable spiritual fire which was ready to burst forth by a mere touch, as it were. Continuing he said, "I knew that whatever occupation Norendra would take up, he would surely shine in it."

At first as has been seen, Noren did not frequent Dakshineswar as often as the Master would have liked. Sri Ramakrishna speaking of those days said that he consoled himself with the thought, "Norendra does not come to me very often these days. It is good, for I always have a great commotion of feeling and enter into Samādhi when I see him. And whensoever he comes he brings with him, as it were, a great event, aye, he makes a great event here." And he would continue, turning to the disciples, "He is wonderful, this boy. He never shows to me that he knows anything. If I praise him before men he leaves the room. He has no trace of Maya. His very appearance shows him to be free from bondage. Aye, he and Rakhal,—these are *Nityasiddhas*, perfect even from their birth. What training they go through, they do not in reality need for themselves ; it is for the good of the world." Indeed, the Master regarded Noren so highly that if anybody spoke of him disparagingly, he would accuse the speaker with the words, "What are you saying ! By speaking in this fashion, you have committed *Shivanindā* !" meaning thereby that to speak slightly of Norendra was as sinful as committing blasphemy. He would also say, "Let no one judge Norendra. For no one will ever be able to understand him fully !" So high was the Master's appreciation of his worthy disciple !

XLIV.

IN THE WEAVING OF THE WEB.

To get a real glimpse of what Noren was conscious of, one must lose oneself to the present and sit with him at the Feet of the Master in Dakshineswar. He must dwell in that circle of ecstasy and in the flame of that radiant consciousness. Noren was changing daily. His attitude towards the Master was now whole-hearted. He literally gave himself up to Sri Ramakrishna, and nothing illustrates this better than an incident which occurred at this time. Noren was seated before the Master. Sri Ramakrishna was speaking upon some great spiritual matter. Noren seemed abstracted. The Master said, "Do listen to me, my boy!" He spoke with great affection and entreaty. Noren replied, "I have not come here to hear you *talk*."

"Then why have you come at all?" the Master asked, as though aggrieved. And Noren made answer with visible emotion, "It is because I am drawn towards you, because I *love* you, that I have come to *see* you." This altered the situation. The Master arose from his seat in an ecstasy of bliss, verging on Samâdhi, and approaching his disciple embraced him. It seemed as if in that moment the last links were forged in that glorious relationship of spiritual love which knows no reason, that devotion which goes deepest into the soul and awakens it to the consciousness of divine truth and blessedness. To Noren, Sri Ramakrishna had become the living embodiment of that radiant life which is the Constant Vision of the Most High. To Noren, Sri Ramakrishna had become the Insight Incarnate and the Living Utterance of that Silence which is God. What need of worshipping divine representations of the Most High, even if they be most exalted! Here was one before his very eyes who literally breathed divinity. Looking upon the face of

his Master, Noren would read worlds of reality therein. To him the Master himself was the Book of Reality. He saw the Name of God spelled into the personality of Sri Ramakrishna with the Everlasting Letters of Actual Realisation. Indeed, Noren felt this was the Divine Man. What need to go to temples ! Here was a Speaking Image of the Mother ! Here was the Presence of Divine Life in the living realisation of the Master himself ! Noren had gone into the innermost of the matter. Yes, he would see the soul of his Guru. But whether he would or would not, he could not help being transported into ecstasy in the presence of the Master.

Only a day or so previous he had spoken to one of his brother-disciples, "If you ask my opinion, I should say, he is the incarnation of LOVE." And yet he knew Sri Ramakrishna as a man of prodigious intellect, as well. How he was convinced of this was singular, as the reader might have noticed in the discussion he had with the Master on the subject of "blind faith," mentioned in a previous chapter. By a simple illustration the Master would set at naught all the great learning of his chief disciple, and would put an end to discussion by saying, "Well, my boy, have you *seen* ; have you *seen* ?" Yes, seeing was all in all ! What was mere thinking ? It might be a process of seeing, a method of subjective sight, but it was not that direct coming into contact which is the true function of sight so that one could say, "Yes, it is so ; it is there ; I see it. Only a blind man cannot see it."

And not long after, it so happened, as it so often did, that the Master inspired his devotees into singing a *Sankirtan*. They all joined hands, Noren in the midst of them, with a *Mridanga*, a drum, hanging about his neck. They sang and danced ; and the names of the Lord rent the air. At the end of the singing Sri Ramakrishna had gone into Samâdhi. Noren went into the verandah. Returning to sense-consciousness the Master asked for his disciple. Finding him absent he said, "It matters not ; he has lighted the fire. It does not matter whether he remains in the room or not !" But, of a sudden, he arose and went to the verandah, where

Noren was, as usual, deeply engaged in religious argument. Sri Ramakrishna, seeing him, asked, "Noren, what are you talking about?" Noren gaily replied, "O ! We are discussing things too high for ordinary mortals." Sri Ramakrishna smiled with much amusement. "Never mind !" he said. "However you may talk, remember, that pure, selfless Bhakti or Love, and pure, selfless Jnana or Knowledge are both one and the same. The goal is the same. Smooth and easy is the path of Bhakti." The Master meant that the path of insight, of illumination, and that of spiritual love and devotion were two highways to the same spiritual consciousness. Insight, however, is difficult to attain, because it implies that one must learn to step cautiously in the field of this world and must attain a searching discrimination as to what is real amidst all the unreality to which desire leads. Insight is the absolute conquest of instinct. It implies the triumph of sheer power of will. The man of insight has to destroy all barriers and deny all limitations, each in their turn. But love speeds with accelerated intensity. It is the short path because, before man is a being of thought, he is a being of feeling. When all his feeling soars to God, when he thinks Him as dearer than the dearest, as his own life and soul, all attachments and limitations which bind him fall away from him of themselves, as it were. The man on the path of Bhakti has not to destroy his feelings, has not to go against his instinct at every step ; he has only to direct his feelings to a new channel,—to God, the Soul of his soul. And Him he feels and tastes, as it were, through familiar forms of relationship, such as, father, mother, friend and so on.

Sri Ramakrishna had struck the true note, and Noren responded at once. He sang, half in prayer to the Mother, and half in reply to the Master, "Yes, there is no use reasoning after the philosopher. Make me mad with Thy Love, O Mother !" Then, turning to a disciple of the Master, he said, "I have been reading Hamilton and he writes, 'A learned ignorance is the end of philosophy and the beginning of religion !'" Love had conquered. Noren thought of the

Divine at this time in the aspiration and deep longing of intense love. What was philosophy! The presence and the realisation of Sri Ramakrishna were more to him than all reasoning and philosophy.

A transfiguration had been taking place in the personality of Noren. The mighty intellect, the overpowering mind, which had at one time dominated him, was gradually giving way before the onrushing greatness of his heart. Where the intellect fails to go, thither the heart quickly speeds. The intellect was now to be the spokesman and the servant of the spiritual realisation. And those who have heard the voice of the Swami Vivekananda in the utterance of his message, or who have read the words of gospel truth which he has left behind him, cannot help being conscious of the live fire of the soul and heart which stand as the background of the splendid array of his thought. It was life; it was living reality; it was Presence which Noren now struggled to see. In a manner which he could not explain he found himself drawn more and more to the Feet of the Master. His heart throbbed for him. He saw that Sri Ramakrishna was a Spiritual Power of the first magnitude, endeavouring to give expression to the supreme knowledge and realisation he had accumulated throughout his entire life. A sweet sympathy arose within him. He seemed to fathom all the pain and struggle which Sri Ramakrishna felt in trying to find an outlet in this world for the great message of his heart. He saw Sri Ramakrishna as a spiritual genius who must be understood, or else the world would be the loser. Thus Noren unconsciously made himself fit to become that very outlet. The love which he felt for the Master put his mind into the requisite receptivity of mood. And this attitude was right, for he was the chosen one amongst all his fellow-disciples, even as Sri Ramakrishna had marked him out to be. The Master in one way or other always inspired him with a genuine sense of responsibility. Instinctively Noren seemed to realise that the spreading of the life-giving spirit and divine insight of his Master was put into his hands. He felt a great joy and a great dignity in

the matter. Indeed, men like Sri Ramakrishna are not born every day, he thought, and to think of the privilege of sitting at the Feet of such a Master translated him from his own time into similar days of the world's spiritual history. His mind thought of Gautama the Buddha and of the disciples of Buddha, and of Jesus the Christ and of the disciples of Christ.

For this reason he was ever on the look-out for the unmistakable signs of divinity and prophecy in his Master's life. In most other respects he was a boy. He was a boy in many ways and in very spirit. But he was a sage in his thought; and in his aspiration he was a saint. It goes without saying that, at this time, there had already descended upon him his Master's spirit and that he felt his was to be the life of renunciation. And this was in keeping with the prophecy, made of him, in his boyhood days, by an elderly hermit-astrologer, who on seeing the signs about him pronounced that he would never lead the life of a householder and who, on seeing his horoscope, confirmed the statements of other members of that science by stating, "Verily, the horoscope of this boy is even like that of the Lord Buddha. Aye, he will be a great Sannyâsin!" Noren also took it for certain that he was to become a monk. If anyone had suggested any other course to him, he would have been astonished, believing that all others had taken this, likewise, for granted. And it was only in his home that he found opposition, but this was not of a nature over which he could not rightfully and convincingly assert himself. Sri Ramakrishna said little one way or the other. He did not personally influence any of his disciples to adopt the monastic life. He was not one to force anyone to do a thing. He gave the spirit. He held the ideal before them; he preached the ways and means. It was left for them to develop the spirit conferred, and to follow the ideal and the teaching. It was for them to employ the methods.

The Master demanded only sincerity. He demanded only earnestness. He demanded deep longing and a great

love for the ideal. He demanded selflessness and purity. In other words, he demanded character, for character, to him, spelled spirituality. He did not say this in as many words. To be with Sri Ramakrishna implied this, and yet there was to be no strenuousness of asceticism. The quest to find God should be a joyous quest. Childlike sincerity and childlike simplicity and deep faith and deep love were the abiding characteristics of Sri Ramakrishna ; and these were made manifest in all his disciples and, particularly, in Noren. The intellectual consciousness was transcended. The seriousness of thought was superseded by the joyousness of the spirit. Sri Ramakrishna was a Child of the Divine Mother. His disciples also were as simple and earnest as children are ; and of such types of heart it has been said, "Verily, unless a man becomes even like unto one of these, he shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven," which is the spiritual realisation and the finding of God.

Noren was full of enthusiasm ; his heart was full of emotion ; his mind bubbled over with, energetic joy ; his soul was innocent and pure. He was the child, the real disciple, the spiritual child of Sri Ramakrishna, the joyous child of the Mother. And in this were the invincible strength, the spiritual exaltation, the mastery over men, the message and the luminous realisation of the Swami Vivekananda.



XLV

GLIMPSES OF PERSONALITY.

Noren acquired power and personality, and a glorious spiritual consciousness, at the Feet of Sri Ramakrishna. One cannot bask in the radiance of a great personality without having the inner powers and potentialities aroused. And Noren literally absorbed the whole meaning of his great relationship as the disciple of Sri Ramakrishna. The words of hope and perception which the Master spoke concerning him invigorated him. He felt power ; and he felt in the innermost recesses of his heart, that he was the "chosen one". He believed in himself ; he realised that he stood on solid ground, spiritually speaking. All that energy which he had previously employed in the solution of doubts and in agonised search, now went forth in the fuller consolidation of his spiritual consciousness. He spoke with great positiveness of heart and thought. His mind being at rest, his will began to build itself about the fabric of a settled consciousness. The intensity he formerly expressed outwardly and with such violence and impetuosity of spirit was now being transmuted into an inwardness of longing and aspiration. He was still the enthusiast, but his enthusiasm was now taking a definite direction. In other words, he was forming a character in the spiritual sense. He was growing settled ; convictions were being established in his mind. Deep feelings were stirring in his heart. He was becoming mature in spiritual thought and in spiritual perception. The boy was becoming the man. The impetuous enthusiasm of youth was transforming itself into the power of deep individualism.

As the disciple of his Master he would tread the streets of the city with such a bearing, that men would stop to look and wonder. He had the native and graceful and free bearing of a wild animal, with absolute freedom of motion.

He would walk along, now slowly and then with speed, his mind all absorbed upon thoughts which literally swept his soul. And yet, he had a certain boyishness of spirit about him and a certain spontaneity of manner which were a delight to all who knew him and, particularly, to his Master. Sri Ramakrishna had the happy faculty of gathering round him handsome and magnificent as well as spiritual disciples. In fact, the most spiritual were regal in their stature and bearing. He looked with pride especially upon Noren.

It would be well to see Noren as he was at this time. His appearance was that of a young man, full of vigour and vitality, with a frame slightly above middle height and somewhat thickset in the shoulders. His chest was expansive. His head was broad towards the front, indicative of high mental power and development. It was well-shaped throughout. There was much grace in the manner he had of turning his head. Indeed, he was one of the few men of whom it may be said, without intimating any femininity of type, that he was graceful. His eyes were the most characteristic of his features. They were often likened to a lotus leaf. They were rather prominent, though not protruding, and greatly varying in their colour, according to the feelings that swayed him at the time. There was a delicate softness, one might say, a feminine tenderness about them. They revealed a keen, alert mind. Sometimes they would be luminous in their depth and steadfastness of gaze ; at other times they would sparkle with pleasure and excitement, according to the nature of the interest which held him. They revealed that peculiar characteristic which was his, namely, that he could lose himself either in sheer fun or in sheer thought. It was his eyes that fascinated and held the attention of anyone who met him for the first time ; and he had a way with him of looking at one which made one feel that he was endeavouring to see into his very inmost soul. They lighted up his whole countenance, showing him to be eager and possessed of the power for deep thought and great feeling. When he was pleased, his eyes opened wide with a childlike joy written in

them. When he wished to express his sense of pleasure or obligation, or desired that a certain favour be granted him, it was this innocent manner and childlike simplicity which would be mirrored in his eyes. When he spoke, it was as if, for the time being, only the world and he existed for the person spoken to. When he spoke giving forth his whole soul in the speaking, one could not but feel flattered within himself. Some accused him of intellectual avariciousness, if such a term can be used, and said that his great interest in any one ceased when "he had wrung him dry," to use their own expression. But it was always true of him that he gave more than he received. It was an intellectual exchange ; and what he gave was vastly more valuable, for, as a teacher and as a man, he gave the highest wisdom in the terms of actual personal realisation. Even now, in his young manhood, his enthusiasm and his great utterances were always a recompense for those who engaged in conversation with him or came into any personal relationship with him. He had a great personal loyalty to, and genuine love for those whom he had once made his own and to whom he had once given his confidence,—characteristics which were unailing with him to the very end of his life. Indeed, at a later time this sense of loyalty went so far as to include, in a real human love, even such as subsequently proved inimical to his cause and to his message, though they had previously accepted both with great enthusiasm.

But to return to a description of his physical personality. As a whole, at this time, his person inclined to a stoutness which added dignity to his bearing. He was muscular and athletic in build and always carried himself to his full height. But one lost sight altogether of the body, being all-absorbed in the interest of studying the facial lineaments. His face was always a study. One never tired of that countenance which was his, for it was never the same. Every emotion which his soul felt was recorded upon it. He had a strong jaw, proving him at once to be possessed of an iron will and of fixed determination. There was romance and picturesque-

ness about him throughout. He seemed to some as a joyous dreamer, to others as an intense thinker, to others again, as one who lives in a world rich with ideal love and beauty ; but to all he seemed as a scion of an aristocratic house. His smile was full and broad. He was a master in fun and jollity.

But when he grew serious, his face would strike awe even in the hearts of his companions. There was a certain childlikeness about him and a simplicity and innocence of manner which endeared him to all. There were times when many of the disciples regarded him as a child ; and they loved him all the more even if he was irritated or exacting or impetuous, because in his case, these human phases were loveable, having no sting in them. Moreover, the added sweetness which he always evinced, after his ebullitions of wrath, towards anyone of them, would make the latter all the more drawn to him. When he became excited in discussion, or was rapt in thought, each single emotion would throw its shadow on his face and bearing. His eyes would be afire ; and those who looked on would actually see upon his face the tremendous power of his personality. Was he hurt, he would draw himself up to his full height with an air of dignity, and would turn his head to one side, casting his eyes upon the ground. Was he absorbed in his own thought, he could send out such a force of repelling reserve that one would not dare to approach him. In moments of personal reserve he had a manner of intense aloofness, which was one of the singular properties of his personality. And was he ever enraged, his face would grow suddenly flushed, like a consuming fire. His eyes would shine forth in all the intensity of his emotion. For let it be known that Noren, both as a young man and as the Swami Vivekananda, was not easy-going or indifferent to his surroundings. He was literally carried away with his emotions when he found his ideals misrepresented or misunderstood by those to whom he had given full confidence, or when he found that his plans were upset by the culpable stupidity of those to whom he had entrusted responsibility. His was the temperament of a genius. Various moods would come upon him,

now of a strange impatience with his environment, and again of a sweet and loving patience of one of those mild types of character and mind, who is indifferent as to results of plans and enthusiastic desires and who possesses a sense of having eternity at his back. Was he ever seriously impatient with his fellow-disciples, he would be as loving as ever the moment after his emotion had subsided. And it might be said that, considering the difficulties under which he laboured and suffered and also the little appreciation that he received from those for whom he laboured and suffered, it was a wonder that his heart did not become steeled. Love and the spirit of gentle forbearing remained with him throughout. He would often think, "Why should one expect to be understood ! It is sufficient that they love me ! After all who am I ! The Mother knows best. She can do Her work. Who am I to think myself indispensable !" At heart, the Swami Vivekananda was more the saint than the prophet.

His discipleship with Sri Ramakrishna gave added dignity to him. When the full consciousness of his Master's words dawned upon him, he was regal ; he was literally godly. He seemed a being apart. And all these were his characteristics unto the end. This is a word-painting of Noren, the disciple, and also of Noren as the Swami Vivekananda. Indeed, his was a radiant personality, a gracious personality and, withal, a powerful personality.

In these days Noren was a burning fire of inspiration to those who knew him ; and so his college companions and other friends admired and loved him. They were spell-bound with his eloquence and spell-bound with his personality. He communicated spirituality to them. His own inspiration became contagious. At that time there was a club in the General Assembly's Institution. Noren became the most famous member of this club, and his eloquence waxed glorious amongst the large number of lads. It was his eloquence in discussing metaphysical questions before this club that prompted his English Professor, the Principal of the Institution, to remark, "He is an excellent philosophical

student. In all the German and English Universities there is not one student so brilliant as he." Later Noren acquired a following, separate and independent of the club and held prayer-meetings regularly. Sri Ramakrishna heard of this; and fearing that Noren's powers might be frittered away before they were fully developed and matured, and that he might become the founder of a sect, brilliant but without the simplicity of the saintly atmosphere, he put a stop to it.

Noren was conscious of his future greatness in these days. To his college friends he used to say, "What! At best you will be lawyers or doctors, or judges. Wait! I shall chalk out a path for myself!" And he emphasised his remarks with tremendous force. Aye! Had he not become the Swami Vivekananda he would certainly have been a figure as inspiring as Keshub Chandra Sen himself; as it was, he became even greater as an influence upon Indian society and the world at large. He had many well-wishers in the Brahmo community, and he used to take part in the dramatic performances which were given, at this time, of Keshub Chandra Sen's well-known "Nava Brindaban." It so happened that Sri Ramakrishna attended one of these performances, as he was anxious to see how Noren played his part. In the midst of the drama Noren appeared, clad as Shiva. His part was that of a Yogi. Sri Ramakrishna was charmed; he was beside himself with joy and, quite unconscious of his surroundings, he exclaimed, "Come down to me, Noren, in that garb, just as you are!"

It may be said that his dire poverty was the making of Noren. It made him responsible. It developed his character. It made a man of him. It made him considerate, sympathetic and sweetly kind. And so Sri Ramakrishna believed; but there were times when the strain became intense. On one such occasion he decided to leave matters in the hands of Providence and fly from the misery of it all. He left the house with only a blanket and a *lotâ*. Then some one informed him that Sri Ramakrishna had come to Calcutta and was at the house of a devotee near by. Noren thought,

"Well, this man, at least, loves me a little after all! Since I am in this terrible plight, let me go and see him for the last time." He went. Sri Ramakrishna knew his thought and took him with him to Dakshineswar. And that night he initiated him into certain Sadhanas or spiritual practices, as has been told in the concluding portion of the chapter entitled, "The Disciple's Meditation." Thereafter, all mental restlessness left him.

Noren was being rounded out. Personally he was developing because of the expansion of his own faculties. Then, also, the love which Sri Ramakrishna bore for him, struck the balance in equilibrium between his intellect and heart. By instinct Noren was a philosopher. That he became a Bhakta or devotee was the working of Sri Ramakrishna. But, lest it be thought that the Master developed only so much religious and emotional sentimentality in his disciple, let it be remembered that the highest philosophical consciousness which Noren ever came to know was, likewise, instilled by Sri Ramakrishna. Insight, tempered and softened by spiritual love, was the foundation of his spiritual consciousness. And the spiritual exercises he learned and practised at the Feet of his Master accorded the final touch to the spiritual finishing of his personality. For in these he realised thought. Thought became visualised and actualised to him.

Here, however, it might be said that Noren was the philosopher in an unique sense. At least Sri Ramakrishna had said so. Though, to all appearances, he was primarily a philosopher, the Master used to say that only a Bhakta, or devotee of God, could have such amiable and beautiful features. "Jnanis are generally dry in their appearance; but Bhaktas are sweet to look upon." However this might have been, the words of Noren himself are best illustrative of his true nature. As the Swami Vivekananda he once said to a disciple of his, making a comparison between himself and his Master: "He was all Bhakti without, but within he was all Jnana; I am all Jnana without, but within my heart it is all Bhakti."

He meant by this that a great mantle of love hid the spiritual intellect of the Master, and a mantle of intelligence covered, as a cloak, the devotional nature which was inmost in him.

Day by day, week by week, the personality of Noren was being shaped. His afflictions and poverty drew out one side of his character, his associations another. Sri Ramakrishna perfected these two sides of his character and moulded them according to the ideal he had in mind,—the ideal which became living and incarnate as the Swami Vivekananda. Sri Ramakrishna said that, had Noren been born in luxury and comfort he would certainly have drifted in some other line of tendency. He might have become a great statesman, a great lawyer, a great public orator or a great social reformer. It may truthfully be said that, had he not known Sri Ramakrishna, he might have become an eloquent preacher with a fashionable following, and might have gathered immense wealth and power about him. As it was, he became the champion of the poor; his message was a call to the assuming of responsibilities on the part of those who were rich, for those who were poor and distressed. As it was, he did not become a fashionable prophet. He became the mouthpiece of a great, throbbing and soul-uplifting message of reality, with utmost renunciation and self-sacrifice as its ideals, and whose burden was the relief of the pain and anguish of the poor. And it was also the dissemination of the light and glory of the Vedas.

Poverty had made the haughty Noren the sympathiser of the poor. The divine character of his Master had taught him that simplicity of heart with its accompanying quality of sincerity brought one quickest to the vision of reality and, also, that the greatest worldly learning, couched in the finest phrases, was only trash as compared with the insight born of the realisation of God. He now realised that there was a difference between great intellectuality and true spirituality, and that however grand the accumulation of learning might become, still it was all foolishness compared with that omni-

science which was the literal seeing of God. Philosophy thus became to him a handmaiden for spiritual realisation. It verified the spiritual experience. It supported, as a foundation, the structure of soul which he was in process of erecting. He did not denounce the intellect; he acclaimed it. But hereafter he made reason subordinate to spiritual illumination. Reason was the path-finder, as it were, but the heart became to him the real traveller whose vision takes in the glory of the whole scene.

Prayer and meditation were the wings upon which Noren rose to the spiritual consciousness. In the life of Sri Ramakrishna he had witnessed spirituality as a life-process beyond the high-sounding beauty of intellectual theories. It was the heart of things which Sri Ramakrishna had touched and which Noren was now beginning to feel. All personal pride had vanished in the larger and righteous self-consciousness of being a disciple of a Divine Master. He was still the brilliant intellect; he was still the young man of great personal dignity and power; he was, also, the splendid dialectician and metaphysician. Yes, his was, also, the happy, fun-loving spirit of a boy, and yet the spirit of the sage encircled his personality with luminousness, as well,—but, above all, he was also the Saint-in-the-Making.

XLVI

AS THE MASTER SAW NORENDRA.

Sri Ramakrishna had made his estimate of Noren's character and possibilities from the very beginning, and he never changed the first opinion he had made of him. And his first opinion was that Noren was no ordinary human being, that he was a soul of exalted spiritual powers. Sri Ramakrishna invariably saw the soul of things. The physical and even the intellectual elements of personality were only facts, as it were, from which he deduced the character and intensity of spiritual worth. In the early days of his acquaintance with Noren and with others of Noren's age who came to him at that time, he told Hazra, a devotee, that he had had a vision in which the Mother revealed to him that She was playing in Her various aspects, to a greater or a lesser degree, in all those pure forms, which he perceived physically before him as his disciples. Noren was the chief of these forms. Sri Ramakrishna had constantly before his mind the innate greatness of his chief disciple. Unconsciously he did so, because it was divinity which he saw in Noren. He saw him in no other light and manner. And he desired to *train* Noren particularly, because he knew that the hour would come when he would have to do work in the cause of spreading the teachings of the Modern Gospel, which was also, in its spirit and contents, the Eternal Religion of the Vedas.

When Noren had attained to perfect discipleship, Sri Ramakrishna was wont to say of him, "Norendra's ideal is the Formless Divinity. He is of the type of the hero, the MAN. So many devotees come, but there is none like unto him. Sometimes I calculate and make comparison in my mind. I find that one is like a lotus with ten petals, another like a lotus with sixteen petals, another with one hundred petals at the most; but amongst lotuses, Norendra is the thousand-petalled."

"Others may be earthen tumblers, small jars and so forth; Norendra, however, is a *jāla*, a huge water-jar which may hold one hundred gallons of water. Among tanks, Norendra is a huge *dighi*, an enormous and deep receptacle of water—like the Haldarpukur. Among fishes, Norendra is the red-eyed *rooi*; others are small fry. He is a huge receptacle which holds a good deal and many, many things."

"Norendra is not dependent on anything. He is not subject to attachment and to sensual pleasures. Norendra is a MAN. When Norendra is amongst the audience, a great wave of strength and courage comes upon me."

He would often say that the very sight of Noren would send him to the contemplation of Brahman, the Absolute. Indeed, it would make him absorbed in Brahman. Once, speaking to Girish Babu, he said, "Norendra is a young man of a very high order. He is a master in many things,—in singing and playing on musical instruments, on the one hand, and in various branches of learning on the other. He possesses the virtues of temperance and truthfulness; and what is more, he is already beginning to know that God is real, that things of the world are of a fleeting nature and that one should not be attached to them. Many and various are the qualities he has."

On another occasion, speaking to a group of disciples, the Master said, "You all see this boy. He is so gentle and unassuming. A boy like him belongs to the class of *Nitya-siddhas*, the Ever-Perfect. They are *Brahma-jñānis* from their very birth. These are never bound by the fetters of this world. Even from their early youth they feel an awakening within their heart and they walk God-wards at once. They belong to the class of the *Ishvarkotis* or *Acharyakotis*. They come down to the world as teachers of mankind. They have no love for the things of this world. You see, Norendra excels in everything. The other day he had a discussion with Kedar. But Kedar's arguments were chopped up, as it were, by him as soon as they were spoken."

"O he is like the proverbial Homā bird, mentioned in

the Vedas. How far it dwells above the tumult of this world ! It lives so high that its egg, falling for days and days, is hatched by the very action of the heat which its swift movement engenders. And the bird is released from the shell long before it comes within the atmosphere of earth and at once soars upwards. Even so is Noren. He comes from the Heights beyond all mortal and all human consciousness. His coming to earth in no way makes him of the earth,—earthly. Before the veils of Maya can enfold him he has learned to soar beyond all bondage into Freedom, and speeds like the spiritual *Homâ* bird, just hatched, to the realm of the Parent, the Eternal Consciousness. Such, indeed, is Norendra."

Were it not for the remarkable and verified prophecies of Sri Ramakrishna concerning Noren as well as others, and also for his absolute frankness in speaking his opinions, his unusual estimation of Noren's character and personality, as so vastly superior to all others, would, to say the least, seem overwhelmingly exaggerated. Sri Ramakrishna, however, was not one to flatter or to pamper anyone. He criticised in a scathing manner those who were powerful and wealthy, did he think they were hypocrites and Pharisees deserving criticism. So when he spoke in this manner of Noren it was because he had perceived, felt and realised that which he spoke concerning him : perhaps it was also because he sought to stimulate to the utmost a powerful self-consciousness within his chief disciple, the self-consciousness of a spiritual genius, who would be free and independent, believing in himself and his great mission of spiritualising others by his own life and teaching.

At another time, the Master said concerning his disciple, "In Keshub and in Bejoy (Goswami)—I found in a vision,—that Jnana was burning in the form of a candle ; and in Norendra I saw Jnana shining as the sun itself !" Noren, even before the *Mahâ-samâdhi* of his Master would often ponder over and digest that which the Master had said of him. He remembered that at the first meeting Sri Ramakrishna, in the state of *Samâdhi*, had spoken the words,

"You have come !" He thought at the time, "How strange ! It is as if he has known me long, long before, and has been expecting me !" During one of the very early meetings of the Master and the disciple, the former, in the condition of supreme insight, sang many sacred songs. He was lost to all ordinary personal awareness. At the end of the singing, he suddenly spoke out, "Narayana ! Thou hast taken this body for my sake !" speaking of the personality of Noren seated before him. Naturally, Noren did not understand then. There were many other strange remarks which the Master passed concerning Noren, both to him and to others. One morning he said to his disciple, "My boy, you came and woke me up last night when I was sleeping and you told me, 'Here I am come now !' " Noren was astounded. What *did* the Master mean ! For he had spent the night in the city of Calcutta. But then, who knows what may transpire in that strange condition of consciousness and personality to which sleep is the avenue !

How wonderful was the Master's love ! When the father of Noren passed away, Sri Ramakrishna told a wealthy friend of his disciple, "Norendra's father is dead. They are starving at home. Now it will be good if his friends help him." When the rich man had taken his departure, Noren said, rather aggrieved, "Sire ! Why did you tell that to him ?" Sri Ramakrishna, seeing that he had hurt his disciple's sense of family pride in having thus made mention of their misfortunes, exclaimed with tears in his eyes, "O my Noren ! My dear Noren, do you not know that I can do anything for you ; aye, for you I can go about begging from door to door !" Noren was overpowered, and fell at his Master's feet. This was love in very truth. It was overwhelming and selfless love. "It was true," as Noren said of himself in relation to his Master at a much later period, "he made me his slave by his great love for me !"

As has been seen, Sri Ramakrishna grew fearfully alarmed when the family of Noren were planning for his marriage. His love for Noren, his desire to save him for the life of the

Soul, made the Master literally prostrate himself before the Feet of the Mother. Holding the Feet of the Image and placing his head thereon, he prayed numbers upon numbers of times and with tears streaming from his eyes, "O Mother ! Do break up all those plans ! May Norendra not sink !" When Visvanath Dutta was no longer and Noren was thrown into a world of misfortune, Sri Ramakrishna, keenly feeling with his disciple, as though he himself were in the direst straits, went to the Temple of the Mother. And he, who hated even the mention of gold,—so great was his love for his chief disciple,—himself prayed to the Mother that She would give him money ! Shortly after, a vision dawned upon the Master in which the Mother Herself addressing him, said, "It will be well with them. They shall have the necessities for their bare maintenance,—coarse rice, coarse lentils, coarse cloth will come."

But, however great might be the love of the Master for Noren, he would be strict with him if he at any time associated with evil companions, even if only by the way. Did the slightest shadow of an impure thought cross Noren's mind, Sri Ramakrishna at once detected it. When Noren came to him, after having associated with any questionable person, he could not look him in the face, as he said, or could not eat from his hand. Even when he had heard nothing of such occurrences, if Noren offered him food, the hand of Sri Ramakrishna could not reach to his mouth ; and once during the time of his illness, though the hand had touched his mouth, he could not eat !

This insight which Sri Ramakrishna possessed was marvellous, almost incredible, were it not for the authenticity of his statements, which have been made prophecy verified in the life of the Swami Vivekananda. They were all super-conscious visions, inexplicable, as yet, though recognised as possible by the foremost psychologists. Slumbering in the deeps of personality are innumerable potentialities, manifesting themselves in concrete ways through the lives of the geniuses and saints. Certainly, the power of foretelling future events

of a personal character is no more strange, as an instance of the extent of the functions of human personality, than the faculty of predicting astronomical and geological happenings long before their actual occurrence. Perhaps some future discovery in the science of psychology will throw a light upon such seemingly extraordinary and trans-personal powers and experiences, and more fully reveal the powers and potentialities of man as a psychical being.

One of the most remarkable visions of Sri Ramakrishna, with reference to Noren, manifested itself through a glorified awareness of the Personal-Impersonal Essence of Brahman. Lost to all outer consciousness, the Master saw this Undivided Essence, divided as it were. On the one side he saw those of his disciples who were devotees and lovers of the Personal God ; on the other side, he saw a great sage immersed in Samādhi and in a mass of radiant, scarlet-coloured substance. He was astounded, but then, he had his own thought concerning *who* this sage was, and he called out, "Noren ! Noren !" The sage opened his eyes. Then the Master recognised that this, indeed, was the same individuality which had been born in a Kāyastha family in the city of Calcutta as Norendra, his disciple.

And there was another vision, before the birth of Noren, which the Master had wherein he saw a Great Light flash like an enormous meteor, from the direction of the sacred city of Benares, across the early morning sky to the city of Calcutta. And he felt, "Now my man is born !"

There was still a third vision which the Master had concerning the spiritual nature of his chief disciple and the assumption of human personality by his soul. In Samādhi the personality of Sri Ramakrishna, in the form of a Luminous Child, travelled further and further into higher spheres of effulgence (*jyoti*), peopled with myriad souls of various states of perfection, such as Devas and Devis, saints and Siddhas, and worshippers of the Personal God. He first passed through these spheres, which were of blue effulgence and then of red. Beyond, still beyond he reached at last a sphere of

brilliant white effulgence, the sphere of the *Akhanda-Sachchidananda*, or the Undivided Existence-Knowledge-Bliss. He plunged into the ocean of that Undivided Effulgence and revelled in its transcendent glory, and returned to the shore without losing his self in it, "by the Grace of the Mother" as he himself put it. Then he saw Seven Rishis (*Saptarishi*) lost in the blessedness of deep Samâdhi. He passed them one by one till he came to one whom he carressed affectionately, with all his powers wishing to draw him out. The sage opened his eyes but once and for a moment, and again sank into deep Samâdhi. He would not break his abstract meditation and dissipate his mind to outer consciousness. Sri Ramakrishna by the power of his Will *dragged* him out. The sage opened his eyes again and a ray (*Jyoti*) from his body projected and descended into the world. Sri Ramakrishna is said to have remarked, "The world is not yet fit to bear the whole of that light. Even this portion of it will be sufficient for the present needs of the world and will work wonders." These things are not for us to explain. Enough, if it be said that the Master saw in super-conscious Vision a streak of light flash across the sky and fall on Calcutta, and leaped with joy, crying out, "My prayer has been granted and my man will some day come to me !" The contents of this vision are beautifully stated in a poem written by the Swami Saradananda. It is translated from the Bengali by another follower of the Bhagavan, and reads,—

"Unruffled is the mighty ocean of Cosmic Mind.
 Lo ! A Light flasheth forth, riseth, taketh shape.
 Maya's play is seen ; the Undivided—divided.
 Who can understand !
 A Child ! All brightness, all loveliness !
 How many millions of suns have been taken to shape
His Form !
 Ascending, He entereth into those sublime regions
 Where minds are withdrawn into the Absolute.

Folding One in His Arms most tenderly,
Holding Him close with love divine,
Sweetly He speaks :

"Oh ! Hero, open Thou Thine Eyes, cease now from
meditation !

The whole world is lost in shadow,
Depart Thou there with me !"

Filled, body and mind with ecstasy by that gentlest touch
The Yogi opens His Eyes, with silent Tears of Joy.
And the hairs of His Body stand on end !

There flasheth forth a Star !
Traversing the milky way it reaches earth.
Once more descends the Man-God on the holy land.
Behold !"



XLVII.

THE GREATNESS OF THE MASTER.

O to have been of that blessed company at the Feet of the Master ! O to have been with Noren, to have thought his thoughts and to have lived in the well-spring of feeling which flowed from and about him. Here was a retreat at Dakshineswar where only the soul shone forth. Everything was made subordinate to the consciousness of the soul. Every act was a stimulus to the awakening of the heart. And, with the Master breathing wonderful words of insight and illumination, no wonder that even the worst characters were transfigured when they saw him.

Sri Ramakrishna was truly the lover of those souls who sinned. For even sinners came to him. He loved strength, even in sin, for he knew that such strength could be diverted into channels of great usefulness. For the sinner was, to him, the potential saint. Noren was surprised at this all-embracing love of his Master. Each person who associated with Sri Ramakrishna was transfigured in one way or another. There were men of all types and character. Noren wondered at it all. The transfiguration which occurred to him, personally, was that of the intellect, which became luminously spiritualised.

There were women, also, who frequented Dakshineswar and who worshipped the Feet of the Master. They all regarded him as their child. There was one woman, so it is said by some of the older disciples, who came to the Master and who was regal in appearance. No one knew her name or the particulars of her family. She came to Dakshineswar and bowed before the Master. For some reason Sri Ramakrishna perceived the Divine Presence of the Mother in this woman, in a much more special sense than he did in the case of other female devotees. It was strange. He touched her, and, lo, she lost all sense of physical awareness, and passed

into a deep Samâdhi. For a long time she remained in that state. When she emerged therefrom she fell before the Master, with the name of the Mother upon her lips. And the Master said of her, "She is of the Madonnahood of the World !"

Gopaler-Mâ was a saint who lived for years in a hermitage on the Ganges side. She had become a saint in the telling of her beads. Hers was the spiritual Ideal of the Adorable Child, Bala-Krishna. In many visions she had seen her Ideal coming in the form of Child-Krishna Himself. She heard of the saint at Dakshineswar. Seeing him from afar she saw not a man, but a child. She addressed him as, "Gopal ! Gopal !" which is a pet name of the Lord as Boy-Krishna. And he called her, "Mâ !" And so she was always known as "Gopaler-Mâ," the mother of Gopal, because it was as a mother that she had made her relationship with God. She thought of Him as her child ; and in this manner she, likewise, thought of Sri Ramakrishna.

There were Mohammedan saints who came to the Master, and followers of Jesus the Christ, and of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion. There were others who were worshippers of Rama, and some who were devotees of the Mother. In some way or other all of them would see in him their own Ideal. In each case divinity manifested itself in their relation with this Man of God. Each would see his own Ideal incarnate in the Master, and would be spiritually uplifted and transported with joy. Because of their having seen him, they would be fortified in their own spiritual strength and in their own particular vision of the Divine Life.

And there were some who came, such as the famous Girish Babu, at once the Shakespeare and Garrick of the Indian stage, a man of worldly views and of broad worldly experience, a man who had lived life as he found it and as impulse dictated. Meeting the Master in Calcutta and thinking it would be interesting to visit him, he went to Dakshineswar ; and in the Temple of Mâ Kâli he heard him sing in such a manner before the Divine Presence, and in

such startling terms of familiarity and intimate feeling, that he said within himself, "This man is either a blasphemous knave or a saint." How he came to accept him as a saint and became a great devotee of his is a long story. Suffice it to say here that Sri Ramakrishna found him a man of prodigious faith and sincerity under the exterior covering of what the world calls a sinner, and showered his great blessings upon his soul. Girish Babu once asking Sri Ramakrishna, "Sire, what shall I do to be saved?" received as answer, "Repeat my name thrice a day!" He said, "Sire, you know very well that I am a man of the world. I am a great sinner. How can I hope to think of you three times a day?" And Sri Ramakrishna replied, "Repeat my name twice a day then!" But even that Girish Babu feared he could not promise to do. And when the Master said that it would be well with him if he repeated his name but once a day,—O for the sincerity of the man!—he said, "Sire, I do not know that I can even do that much." "Very well," said the Master. "Resign yourself fully to me and be at peace. Your salvation rests in my hands!" And he who could not promise to take the name of his Master even once a day, repeated the name "Ramakrishna" many, many times daily all through his life and passed away with the Name of his Guru, his *Ishtam* on his lips. And in the days before his death he was constantly uttering fine spiritual sayings. He had become a sage and had fulfilled the prophetic words of the Master spoken to him years before, "Girish, a time will come when people will marvel at you."

Sri Ramakrishna never placed human conduct in the narrow and puritanical category of virtue and vice, but of strength and of weakness. And he knew that each man will overcome and in time outgrow all weakness according as the light of the soul grows upon him. He must become strong. It is not in overcoming only, but in outgrowing that the goal is to be reached. Such is the destiny of the spiritual life.

Noren saw famous men, physicians, authors, lawyers, professors, religious leaders come to the Master. He saw them

bow before him, taking the dust of his feet. He became convinced that Sri Ramakrishna was a wonderful character to be able to bring so many persons of such varying temperaments into one great spiritual grouping together. Physicians would test the Master. Did he go into Samādhi, they would bring a coin into contact with his body. That very moment his whole frame would writhe, as though in pain, showing in what a remarkable manner the higher consciousness of the Master had left its impress upon the body, and how the sympathetic nervous system had become so charged with spiritual impressions that, even when outward consciousness had receded, the body would, in response to the highest thought, repel the least contact with gold or any other metal. They noted down his sayings and found them to be the utterances of the Highest Realisation. They found, too, that there was a sound, sane and inexplicably wonderful relationship between the conscious will of Sri Ramakrishna and this unconscious state of the body. Then, many times, the experience would leave him semi-aware of his surroundings. And at all times, they found that each experience was a trans-human phenomenon of personality. All were in one way or another convinced of the spiritual magnitude of this man and of the wonderful command he exercised over the functions of human personality.

Noren saw and marvelled. And to think that his Master had made him the centre of his affections ! Had he been of an ordinary calibre, had he been any other than Noren, he would have been conceited. As it was, he was deeply humble. Only in his inmost soul was he glad. He felt sure of himself because the Master was so sure of him. Yes, he was, indeed, marked out for the spiritual consciousness. In this mess of a world he was to see the divine nature made manifest and incarnate, at least for him. Amidst all its fraud he was to find reality. He thought, "Who am I without my Master ?" All his earlier ambition to excel as an orator and public man now became transformed into higher aspiration. He desired nothing but truth.

The entire atmosphere about Sri Ramakrishna was the presence of the Divinity itself to Noren. He thought that he was nothing, from a worldly point of view, in comparison to the numbers of others, known to fame and occupying high positions, who came to Sri Ramakrishna ! The Master had passed over all of them for him. But then, he was not influenced in his choice by men who occupied high worldly positions. He could not bear conceit. To one who was enormously rich and who thought himself to be highly spiritual, he said, "You are a worm-eaten, old, earth-bound householder." To another, famed as a public man who made an ill-judged remark, he said frankly, " People call you great, but I cannot reckon you as that ! You are a small-minded man, low-born as you are !" But such remarks would give no offence to the persons addressed, and they would admit in their hearts and to the Master himself that he had spoken truly, and would become his admirers. So far as Sri Ramakrishna was concerned, worldly-minded men, however great their position, and Pandits with mere book-learning and no realisation were as dust.

It was these characteristics of the Master which imprinted themselves deeply on the chief disciple. His great compassion for those who erred, his deep understanding of the frailties and the possibilities of mankind, his earnestness and straightforwardness, his absolute fearlessness and his frankness, became to Noren ideals for the forming of his own character. And it was these very characteristics of his Master which, in time, transferred themselves into his own personality. His views broadened daily in the presence of Sri Ramakrishna. He had ample opportunity for observation and study of human nature, which he utilised to the utmost. It was the great charity of Sri Ramakrishna which made the deepest impression upon him.

He often called to mind that spontaneous utterance which he made when Sri Ramakrishna said to him, " Listen, my boy ! Worldly people speak all manner of things against godly people, but they should act like the elephant

who passes through the public road, indifferent to the dogs running after him and barking. The elephant turns a deaf ear to them and goes on his way. Suppose, my boy, people should speak ill of you behind your back, what would you think of them?" The disciple at once replied, "I should look upon them as a lot of barking dogs." The Master laughed sweetly and said, "No, no, you need not go so far as that. You may not mind them, but you should look on everyone as Narayana. God dwells in all beings, and plays in them in various ways. One may be a saint-Narayana and another a villain-Narayana!"

Noren, as the Swami Vivekananda, had many occasions to put his Master's charitable teaching into actual practice. For, when he was maligned and slandered, and when those who feared that his teaching would injure the Christian missionary purse for India, heaped calumny upon him, he said nothing. He smiled at their childish attempts and forgave all. Was not the divinity in them! Aye, he blessed them!

Another time he was discussing different religious beliefs with his Master. He waxed eloquent in his denunciation of certain sects and of devil-worship. He became a torrent of wrath. The Master looked with much love at him and said, "My boy, there is a back door to every house; why should not one have the liberty to enter into a house by that if one chooses to? But, of course, I agree with you that the front entrance is the best." It was this manner of teaching which charmed Noren. It modified his puritanical view of life which he as a Brahmo had. Sri Ramakrishna could not bear the word, "sin"; and he taught Noren how to regard mankind in the more generous and truer light of weakness and of strength. What matters it if a man falls; for that reason is he to be trampled under foot or shunned! Sri Ramakrishna had no such terms in his spiritual vocabulary as "born in sin," and "a child of wrath." He had no sympathy with the exaggerated theological conceptions of sin. He admitted that man was born with limitations; but where others fixed their attention only upon limitations, he foresaw

that the destiny of each soul was the triumphant conquest of all limitations. Man is a child of the Divine Consciousness, a member of the Divine Body of Reality. Sin is a nightmare from which the experience of pain and sorrow awakens him, and he proceeds, with constant prayer and discrimination, on the Path whose goal is beyond all darkness and illusion, then comes to know himself as the Child of God, as the Pure One.

On one occasion when Noren was denouncing the degenerating influence of certain weaknesses of schoolboys, believing them to be undermining their character, Sri Ramakrishna chanced to pass by. Hearing Noren speaking excitedly, he asked him concerning what he was so eager and, when he heard, he said, "Why talk of these matters! Talk of the Lord and nothing else!"

This was the teaching. To keep the mind inflexibly fixed upon the Ideal was the aim of life. Why talk of other things! The incident brings to mind the wonder of the Master's realisation. Sometimes he literally wept, when people were discussing worldly affairs before him, crying out, "O Mother, why have you brought these men to this place?" One recalls how sincere he was in this, and how he insisted that his disciples keep their thoughts always fixed upon God. One recalls how he slapped an elderly Brāhmana and even Rani Rasmani when he found them seated in meditation but with their minds fixed on other things. Such was his power of reading thought. Sri Ramakrishna was out-and-out a man of spiritual honesty and integrity. He could be severe in his capacity as a spiritual teacher. All his experiences were the result of test. And these characteristics were also prominently noticeable in Noren, the disciple. Sri Ramakrishna, be it remembered, was a man who had also doubted his realisations, saying, "If this be true, O Mother, and not simple imagination, let so-and-so come to me", and the person he would mention would come on that very day when there was every reason to believe that this would be most improbable. In other ways also he tested

his experiences, as for example, when he wanted to be assured that the Divine Mother Whom he worshipped in the Image of the Temple at Dakshineswar was a Living Reality Who heard his prayers, and not a stone image, he put a piece of cotton-wool near the nose of the Image. And lo, to his vision the cotton actually moved by the breath! He even went so far as to demand that, if a certain realisation he had was really true, then "let this enormous stone jump on the ground as a frog leaps." And, though it seems out of all proportion to daily experience and savours of the mystical and mythological, in the words of the Master, "the stone presently bounced several times as a frog leaps!" To Sri Ramakrishna it proved incontrovertibly that his realisation was true. Thus he always said, "Whatever I teach, I have *seen*."

Truly, never were natures so much alike and yet so seemingly opposite in so many shades and aspects of character as those of Sri Ramakrishna and him who became the Swami Vivekananda. And to those of spiritual vision, it is seen that Ramakrishna and Vivekananda are names of the same reality, and that they are one individuality, diverted into two separate streams of personal consciousness, because of the needs of the time which they came to fulfill.

And the disciple daily grew into the likeness of his Master. Even it may be said that Ramakrishna became Vivekananda, having breathed his own soul into Noren; and Vivekananda became Ramakrishna in having completely transformed himself into the spirit of the Master, and in having interpreted that spirit in its true essence and significance before the world.



XLVIII

TOWARDS THE GOAL.

During the first four years of their relationship, such was the teaching Sri Ramakrishna gave unto Noren, and such was the environment in which Noren grew beyond the confines of his utmost hope with regard to the spiritual life. Four years back he had come to Sri Ramakrishna asking, "Sire, have you seen God?" And for these four years the Master had trained his disciple into that condition of personality where it became possible for the latter to give to others the same reply which the Master had given to him, "Yes! I have seen God!"

It is difficult to state accurately, from a chronological point of view, just when Noren became the disciple of the Master. From a mystical view-point he had become the disciple in that moment when Sri Ramakrishna had touched his heart. It was then that he took literal possession of his personality. But consciously Noren became the disciple only when his intellect had been convinced, which was a process of some months. Thus when he became the disciple, it was irrevocably that he did so. Then, too, had he tried, he could not have broken from the powerful realisation of Sri Ramakrishna. So it suffices to regard Noren as the disciple from the very commencement. The experience of discipleship in which his mind lingered before his full acceptance of the Master, was only in the way of training. Had he accepted him from the very beginning, without understanding, he would not have become the powerful personality of the Swami Vivekananda, who was possessed of the power of convincing others because he himself had gone through a personal process of being convinced. There was purpose,—all the more glorious because of its being unconscious,—in every phase of relationship between the Master and his disciple, and this purpose

was the making and the preaching of the Modern Gospel of Hinduism.

Noren came frequently to Dakshineswar during the first two years. During the third year he came still more frequently. During the fourth year he came constantly. During the fifth and last year he practically lived with the Master until his passing away. As there were no stirring events in the life of Sri Ramakrishna from a worldly point of view, there were consequently no such stirring events for Noren. There were no hasty comings and goings, in a worldly sense, no excited rise and fall of personal ambition and fortune. It was all silent realisation and silent teaching and silent assimilation of teaching. There were events, to be sure, even stirring events, but these had relation, not to time, but to eternity, being spiritual in character. For each time Noren visited Dakshineswar it was a stirring event, both to himself and to his Master. It was an event marking the progress in the intensification of their relationship and in the absorption of ideas and ideals on the part of the disciple. He was becoming saturated with a certain spirit.

It was this spirit which Sri Ramakrishna finally imparted to Noren in the fullest sense. During the fifth and last year of his discipleship, Noren attained the highest spiritual consciousness. The Master gave him all that was to be given, all that he had. Sri Ramakrishna compared himself to one who had struggled hard amidst almost insuperable difficulties to acquire a great treasure and Noren was the son and heir to reap the benefits and enjoyments of this treasure. Sri Ramakrishna had built up a great Spiritual Empire, conquering the invading elements of lust and gold, dangerous to the religious realisation and to the expansion of the spiritual consciousness of humanity. Noren was to rule over and extend this Empire broadcast over the earth. Sri Ramakrishna had dived deep down into the spiritual ocean. Noren was to show to the world the treasures which the Master had found. Sri Ramakrishna was the realisation and insight. Noren was to become the utterance thereof.

Thus, for nearly five long years the Master trained the disciple, initiating him into each single realisation which he had made his very own in those twelve years of his ascetic life. He revealed to him, not in so many words, but in the revelation of an illuminated consciousness, the Complete Synthesis of Hinduism which Noren later preached. For nearly five long years Sri Ramakrishna lived as the Spiritual Fact before Noren's very eyes, and Noren's task was the understanding of that Fact. It was necessary, for he was to spread the Revelation of it to the world.

Intellect and heart were both fully educated in this spiritual discipline of five years. Noren the philosopher, became gradually transformed into Noren the saint and seer. Upon the grand and indestructible foundation of his intellectual consciousness he built the fabric of a great faith and of a deep spiritual insight. The words of the Master made their living impress upon him. The Master's spiritual assurance became his own; and the disciple had heard the highest spiritual truth explained in the simplest terms. The simplest object or occurrence would serve Sri Ramakrishna in the elucidation of his teaching. In Sri Ramakrishna Noren had found, in these years, the living exemplification of that which he later on uttered to audiences in Europe and in America, "The highest truth is always the simplest." He had seen in Sri Ramakrishna great spiritual reason; but, more than reason, he had witnessed in him a readiness and an intimacy of the spiritual perception.

He understood Sri Ramakrishna. He had come to look upon the "brain-sick old man" of former times as a God-like Man, verily, as Divinity Incarnate and a Saviour of souls. For had not his own soul been saved by the Master! He thought of him frequently as the Light of the World; for was he not so to Noren's own soul and to the souls of numerous devotees? He looked upon him as a Revelation Incarnate, for had not Sri Ramakrishna revealed divinity unto him and unto them all? He believed so; he knew so. This man was the giver of the spiritual consciousness. He had

not only conferred it upon Noren himself, but upon many others. He had put many others besides Noren into a sleep of the body and an awakening of soul by merely touching them. Noren had seen sinners made saints before his eyes by the spiritual power of Sri Ramakrishna. Verily, the overwhelming power of his realisation dispelled the darkness of their souls and washed away their sins. And he had seen those whom people regarded as spiritual unmasked of their seeming sanctity by his penetrating power of insight. For many are the stories told of the Master as to how he could not take water from the hands of evil-minded persons or sit upon a mat they had spread out for him, or accept offerings which they had laid at his feet. And Sri Ramakrishna had read Noren's own thought and those of his friends, and also of others whom he knew. Indeed, he was the Seer of seers.

What a delicate spiritual sensitiveness the Master had ! On a certain occasion it occurred to him that the earth itself was the body of the Lord and that all flowers were already offered unto Him. So, what need to pluck them and offer them to any special Image ! Or, in some exalted mood he would refuse to tread upon the grass for fear that he might hurt it and the life it represented. Or, in still another mood, he would literally feel a slap, given to another by one enraged, and bear the mark on himself as if he had received the blow. Or, he would feel intensely the pangs and misery of the poor and then ask that they should be helped, even as he had asked of Mathoor Babu, as they passed through a certain poverty-stricken village, to feed and clothe the famished villagers. Or, again, it might be that he would feel a human step upon the earth as a step upon his own breast when, in the higher stages of perception, he felt the Self of him to be one with that All-pervading Universal Self present everywhere.

And he could *will* himself into the condition of supreme blessedness at any time whatsoever. From the very commencement of the twelve years of his ascetic practices he could put his own consciousness into such transcendental states that vision became a normal fact with him, which

could be roused at any moment by the slightest suggestion. He was always the possessor of his own mind. It would be better to say that he was always *the possessor of his own soul*.


Noren having sat at the Feet of Sri Ramakrishna, had had his eyes opened to these facts of true spirituality. Intellect was the least part of it. It was all heart. It was life itself. This gave him enormous strength. It sharpened his desire to realise truth. It brought upon him a great burning aspiration. Sri Ramakrishna watched the progress of his disciple's mind and heart. He must have realised that the time was drawing near when he would find it wise to impart the highest consciousness to Noren,—that consciousness of which the touch at the heart had been only an inkling. He had given Noren his love and his knowledge. The time was now fast coming on when he must give him his realisation also. For Sri Ramakrishna could impart spirituality even as one can give a flower or bestow a gift. Noren had been imploring him for realisation. He had murmured at what he believed to be only meagre results of his spiritual practices. True, he *felt* that God was ; he had moments of heightened feeling when it seemed that the inmost soul of him was becoming conscious of itself. The name of the Mother caused a great joy within him. The presence of his Master had become to him a constant realisation. Indeed, he had even had, on several occasions during these years, incontestable and unassailable proofs. In the deeps of meditation he had largely grown out of the body-consciousness. The state of meditation was forming itself for him into a fixed habit, which manifested itself outwardly in later years as the power of the conscious mind to plunge into the deepest concentration upon any subject. This, in itself, was vision and luminous realisation. He was now sensing spiritual powers within him. He had gone beyond the mere ecstasy of devotional worship ; he had even gone beyond the mere intellectual consciousness of reality. He had known moments when he literally touched divinity and was made physically conscious of Reality in the spiritual development of his senses by their transfiguration of

function and faculty. His thought became a sweeping power. And on one occasion he exemplified this.

In the garden of Cossipur whilst he was sitting with a brother-disciple after a deep meditation, in an interval of the *Shiva-râtri Pujâ*, he touched him, desiring to test if he could give him by instantaneous transmission a certain high consciousness of the Advaita Vedanta which he himself possessed. This brother-disciple alluding to this act afterwards said, "As Noren touched me, I felt a strong sensation pass through my entire body. It was like an electric current. When I had received this, I passed into a deep state of meditation and lost all consciousness of the body and the ego in an unspeakable feeling of blessedness." Indeed it was seen that when he emerged therefrom, he was an out-and-out Advaitin, whereas before he had been a Bhakta, or a lover of God. Noren literally gave him this spirit. But the Master on hearing this reproved Noren, telling him that he had spent his powers too prematurely, and that he had also diverted the tendency of the soul of a brother-disciple whom he had been training on other lines. The disciple referred to, became the eminent Vedantic scholar, the Swami Abhedananda.

Noren had literally become a man in the spiritual sense. He felt enormous power. He was now the saint, the Son of the Mother, unto Whom he had given himself up, body, mind and soul. Sri Ramakrishna watched him carefully as one watches a priceless treasure. From the beginning of his fifth year with Noren he had started in motion certain powers which were leaving his own personality, as it were, and transplanting themselves into the body and mind and personality of Noren. And, at this time, the cancer in the throat from which he was suffering became worse. Towards the close of the fourth year he had to be removed to the Cossipur Garden-house, for the sake of treatment, it being nearer to Calcutta. Some one said to the Master, "Lo! You are a great yogi! You can cure yourself if you but exert your will!" And he replied, "My mind is given up to the Mother. Why should I put it upon this unclean body which is only a cage of bones!"

And Noren kept insistently begging his Master for the very highest Samâdhi. The Master said nothing. He only blessed him and loved him all the more tenderly. Truly, the ties were being bound deeper and faster. The Master would give him the highest Samâdhi. He had it in mind, but he said nothing. It was in the nature of the law of things that Noren should first go through a certain training. And after that, it came for him, the highest, even the Nirvikalpa Samâdhi. Sri Râmakrishna lived only a short while after that event, himself soon entering for the last time this Highest Consciousness of Brahman.



XLIX.

THE GREAT UNDERSTANDING.

Shall Divinity be circumscribed by a name! Does the idea of the personal god-head conflict with the conception of impersonal divinity! "Personal and Impersonal!" These are but names. The Reality is the Divine Essence; and the longing of the human soul cannot be compressed into either "Personal" or "Impersonal." Thus, "Mother" and "Brahman" are names for the same Fact. What matters the vista through which that Fact is seen, whether it be Personal or Impersonal, or something even beyond both. This was the teaching of Sri Ramakrishna. This was the teaching of the Swami Vivekananda also. And as to the spiritual experience, what difference can there be, in this luminous grasping of things, between the Beatific Vision of the Mother and the Nirvikalpa Samādhi, or the Consciousness of Brahman? Men are fooled by names. Ideas confuse the mind. But the Divine Nature is One. The longing of the human soul for Truth is one, whatever the name of that longing; its object is one; and the realisation to which this longing leads is always one,—the transfiguration of human personality, the awareness of the Divine Essence.

Thus, one's mind enters with Noren the group of devotees at Dakshineswar, and later on at Cossipur, and witnesses the spiritual experience of the Master. One finds Sri Ramakrishna speaking many things, but they are all utterances of the One Truth. He addresses the Most High under various names, and yet it is but one atmosphere of divinity in which he dwells. To him there is no difference between the personal realisation, or the seeing of God as Person, and the realisation which is the Consciousness of Brahman, or God the Absolute. Both convey the same spiritual significance and illumination. Both bring the same results,—the abnegation of personality and the birth of the consciousness of

divinity. Both lead to the same end,—bliss and blessedness.

The whole essence of Noren's training as a disciple is witnessed herein. It was an all-inclusive training wherein everything was fulfilment and nothing denial. It was the gradual intellectual and spiritual illumination with regard to the whole burden of Sri Ramakrishna's life and teaching, namely, that all paths of religion are paths to God and that all religions are one in the essence. Thus, it is readily understood how Noren, both as the disciple and as the Swami Vivekananda, was able to throw his whole personality with equal enthusiasm into any ideal and into any form of worship. It is also seen how he was able to detach the ideal from its ceremonial and liturgical atmosphere and perceive it as a spiritual reality in the abstract, as an aspect of truth, as a symbol and phase of the Divine Nature and, also, as an actual personal manifestation thereof. It is also readily understood how he was able to see beyond any separate intellectual or spiritual distinction in the religious ideal, and perceive the same essence and divinity throughout as the one thought of all religious languages.

But in his heart Noren was given over to his Master. His present spiritual ideal and the spiritual presence which he constantly held before him was the personality of Sri Ramakrishna. Noren had now gone into the depth of things. Human longing and vision, whenever and wherever real, sincere and actual, he felt, must end in realisation. So all religious ideals are true. The personality of Sri Ramakrishna, surcharged, as it was, with a wonderful admixture of human reality and divine realisation, was more to him as a stimulus to the awareness of the truth in religion than all the other ideal visions of man. He saw before him the loving, struggling, suffering, human personality transformed the next moment into a divine personality, in the religious experience. Samādhi and God were the culmination of genuine human longing. The human and the divine, he began to see, were inseparably related, the link between them being the reaching-

out of the human heart. Thus, by degrees, he came to know religion as a genuine human fact. It was no longer metaphysical to him as it had been when he was a member of the Brahmo Samaj. It was no longer intellectual or philosophical. Its elements were composed of the living experience of the human soul. Its achievements lay in realistic efforts and in the actual conquest of human limitations. He saw this before him in the daily life of Sri Ramakrishna. It was the visible revelation of the soul over the animal-human nature. It was the triumph of the spirit over the bondage of personality, confined in the net of food and sleep and sex and fear. He saw in the living, speaking, moving figure of the Master the veritable incarnation of the spiritual consciousness, composed as it was of striving and realisation, of elements both human and divine. This was real religion. He came to understand the whole struggle of the ages in the light of the soul-revealing personality before him. Religion to him now meant the revelation of the soul, the gradual manifestation of divinity through the triumph over limited personality.

He began to perceive religion as the path to the finding of the Real Self in man, through the crucifixion of selfishness into selflessness. Sri Ramakrishna was the living text-book from which he read the meaning of the Scriptures and the motto of all philosophy, "Man, know thy Self!" So he could never become a religious fanatic. He had seen the human side of the struggle for the finding of God. What mattered theories or fine phrases! It was the throbbing sincerity, the real longing to transcend all limitations, which he discovered and now knew to be the sole meaning of the religious life. What matters in this light how one perceives the Ideal, or what path one treads to reach the goal, so long as the Ideal, so long as the goal, is really desired. Religion was completely taken out of its theological setting for him, and became transformed into the setting of human life and human struggle.

And what matters as to belief! Realisation is all in all. Sri Ramakrishna was the Man of Realisation. Noren aspired

to be even like him. And his desire was fulfilled. It was because he had lived in the garden of Dakshineswar and in that of Cossipur with the Master that he was later on able to stand before large audiences and utter the words of a gospel which stirred the human heart to its very depths. In the presence of his Guru Noren dwelt in a spiritual world, the inhabitants of which were the simple-minded and the simple-hearted devotees of Sri Ramakrishna, the light of which was the beautifully human and humanly divine personality of the Master. Noren came to stand on firm ground because he was touching the human foundation of all religious systems. The voice of his Master, the tears and smiles during his spiritual experiences, the manner in which he walked and ate and performed the thousand and one things of human life, became gospels and apocalyptic revelations unto him. And how shall divinity ever be revealed if not in all the sweetness and in spite of all the limitations of human personality? Noren sat at the Feet of the Master and in his eyes he read the whole meaning of the Vedas and the Upanishads. Spirituality was therefore no longer garbed for him in fine but impractical metaphysics. It presented itself in all the simplicity and in all the divinity of human life.

It was the human element in religion which became the infallible guarantee of its reality to Noren. God became to him not far removed from human longing. Through the personality of his Divine Master, he saw even the grand height the consciousness of Brahman, as linked to the human desire to expand and expand until the moment of the transfiguration of the soul is near at hand;—indeed he saw that Brahman is real because human sincerity and human anguish to break all bonds are real. The proofs of Brahman are in the human desire to attain to that state and in the human vision thereof.

And what are the elements of the spiritual consciousness? The very faculties of sense themselves. These are not limitations. It is the misuse of their functions and the manner in which the will allows them to act that constitute the bondage. For the senses themselves may become the agencies in the

translation of human into divine perception. They themselves may become the instruments through which the impersonal divine nature is personally perceived and realised. So long as human consciousness has not been completely transcended, divinity will always reveal itself through the personal manifestation. It may be a spiritual individual, or it may be a spiritual ideal, which becomes the perspective through which divinity is personified. And the personal vision is none the less real because human. On the contrary, it is incontrovertibly sure. Of course Noren realised that the goal is the attaining of the Divine Consciousness Itself, the reaching out to and the finding of infinity, eternity, deathlessness and reality even here and now in this world of limitations and of time, mortality and change. And Sri Ramakrishna was the human consciousness transfigured into divinity by the realisation of divine ideals; and thus Noren saw the divine incarnation before his very eyes in this man who had long since forgotten and completely transcended his humanity in a sublime search for and discovery of the divine nature.

Whether he was literally an Incarnation of God did not occupy the attention of Noren's thought. He saw the character of the Master. That told a more complete tale in the way of revelation than all the most well-balanced metaphysical theories put together. Noren's views at this time were broad, in fact too broad for the average understanding. He accepted Sri Ramakrishna in a larger sense than most of those about him. He often grew impatient over their tendency towards fanatical, limited, and prejudicial acceptance of the Master. He held him in too high reverence to place his personality into the narrow measure of the ordinary understanding of the Incarnation theory. Noren was too much matter-of-fact spiritually to be self-deluded. He unconsciously accepted Sri Ramakrishna's life as the demonstration of the means towards all spiritual ends. He saw the spiritual pathfinder in him. He heard his words as utterances of human verity in regard to the highest possibilities of the spiritual life. He instinctively sensed in Sri Ramakrishna that which

he later understood in the light of the science of a spiritual psychology, namely, that human personality can transcend its own boundaries by sheer effort at the intensification of consciousness upon trans-personal ideals. He commenced to perceive religion as an organised system for the stimulation of such transfiguration of consciousness. All the efforts of the saints had been this. And in Sri Ramakrishna Noren saw these efforts brought into the highest possible practice and realisation. He tried to express this, but succeeded only in uttering philosophical platitudes. Later on he was able to express it in a thoroughly human and thoroughly real way because, in the widening vision of manhood, he saw his own Master in a historical light as the embodiment of certain transcendental ideas and as a great human power in their conservation. He saw him in an intensely human light as the re-maker and preserver of the Hindu *Dharma* ; and in this light he saw in Sri Ramakrishna a new Chaitanya, a new Sankarâchârya, a new Buddha ; aye, and even more, for the difficulties which stood in the way of the reinvigoration of the Hindu consciousness were far more numerous and serious in the present age than at any previous time. Instinctively Noren realised all this as a fact ; and instinctively he saw the greatness of Sri Ramakrishna.

Here again it must be understood that Noren's non-acceptance of Sri Ramakrishna as an Incarnation of God, as ordinarily understood, was not a state of bitter agnosticism. He wanted a larger definition. Even as he had passed through a tempest of agnostic thought in other times emerging therefrom into the desire for God, so now he, likewise, instinctively groped in the darkness of his limited illumination for a more worthy understanding of the idea of Incarnation, so far as he himself was concerned. To the ordinary theological understanding, the idea of the infinity of God is confounded with the idea of physical vastness which cannot be compressed into the small compass of a human form. But later on Noren in his searching realised that God's infinitude meant the unlimitedness of a purely

spiritual entity, and as such it did not suffer in the least by expressing itself in human form and manifesting in it the Divine nature in all its exalted character. Nay, he went further ; he realised that a Man in the striving even becomes God. In this sense he succeeded in the end in accepting Sri Ramakrishna as the Divinity Incarnate ; and in this sense he saw in him *whatever Divinity there is*. Thus by accepting this more human and this more really divine outlook he did not deny the possibilities of Divine Incarnation. The idea of God becoming Man is a theological possibility, though speculative in its nature ; whereas Man becoming God is a human reality, witnessed before in the illuminated life of Lord Buddha who "*worked*" his way to divinity. That is why Buddha—to Vivekananda's mind,—was so sure an example of the possibilities of Man *becoming* God. And moreover he held that all beings may become divine, and that divinity resides in every being, even in a worm, in a potential form, the difference being in the degree of manifestation only.

Even as the agnosticism of his earlier days was in reality a looking amidst darkness for a light, even so his constant doubting of the Master was in reality a constant search for a conception which he finally embodied in the words "EACH SOUL IS POTENTIALLY DIVINE. THE GOAL IS TO MANIFEST THIS DIVINE WITHIN."



L

IN THE GROUP OF DISCIPLES.

Though there were many, many devotees about the Master, there were some who were amongst the chosen. There were some who were specially marked out by his favour and by his love, because he felt that the Nārāyana or divine nature was more developed in these than in the others. He treated them with special affection and particularly initiated them into the higher stages of realisation and spiritual awareness. And they, in their turn, were more bound to him by their love and devotion than the others. These chosen devotees and disciples were of two classes,—the one of householders, and the other, a group of some eighteen lads who became the Sannyāsins of the Order of Ramakrishna, as it was founded, later on, by the Swami Vivekananda. Both the householder and the Sannyāsin followers of the Master were deeply loved by Norendra. They were a part of his life, and they loved him passionately. When Sri Ramakrishna had gone, they made him the centre of their hope, love and loyalty.

Among those who were householders was Rama Chandra Dutta. He was the chief of many of them, a great devotee, and also a relative of Noren. It was he who towards the end of his life became practically a Sannyāsin and lived an ascetic life, observing at the same time the duties of an ideal householder. Following upon the passing of the Master, he founded a retreat named *Yogodyān* near Calcutta, and made disciples. Then came Surendra Nath Mitra, a great soul and a lover of the Master, who supported the Ramakrishna monastery at Baranagore, when the band of young men, under the leadership of Noren, formed themselves into a monastic order. Then there were the saintly characters, such as Nāg Mahāshaya and Balarām Bose, men of great devotion and spirituality. It was Nāg Mahāshaya

who bowed at the Feet of Noren when he had heard Sri Ramakrishna's words, "Norendra is a sword unsheathed ! These words are all right in his mouth". Nâg Mahâshaya had been discussing with Noren concerning the Grace of God, and he had received as answer, "Who is He ? I myself am God ! I am the Paramâtman ! The infinite is my own nature. I am He ! I am He !" Noren at that time was imbued with the highest *Advaita* spirit. Nâg Mahâshaya regarded the Swami Vivekananda verily as Shiva Himself incarnate. Nâg Mahâshaya himself possessed spiritual power of the highest order ; he was the very personification of humility and of a burning love for God. He saw God in every being, even in a snake, and at one time, in the Ramakrishna monastery at Baranagore, he said to a venomous snake which had appeared and was terrifying the community, "Come Mother ! Go to your own home !" He spoke these words with great tenderness, and the snake departed. Stories and anecdotes of like nature concerning him are numerous, and they reveal him as a real *Mahâtman* or perfected soul.

Balaram Babu had thrown open his house to the Master. He was a wealthy zemindar or landlord, and a man of extensive charities. Sri Ramakrishna thought very highly of him. He had many days of ecstasy and talks at his house with his devotees. Even now, practically, a certain portion of his spacious house in Baghbazar, Calcutta, is a sort of monastery. Some members of the Order are always there. And at Puri, the house of the son of Balaram Babu is also a monastery of the Order, to all intents and purposes. The whole family are, hereditarily, Bhaktas, and venerate the spiritual sons of the Master.

Of Girish Chandra Ghose the tale is already told. He was the glorious sinner whose faith had made him whole, and who became the sage and seer in his latter days. It was of him that the Master said, "Well ! If others have a certain per cent. of intellect, the intellect of Girish is one hundred and fifty per cent. in degree." Girish Babu was the author of some eighty plays, and the idol of the Bengalee stage. He

is regarded as one of the great masters in the literature of Hinduism.

Mathoor Babu, the son-in-law of the famous Rani Rasmoni was the earliest of the householder disciples. He was a princely man ; but he was more princely in his relation to the Master as a devotee.

Kalipada Ghosh was a great devotee. There were three devotees who were called the "Dânâs" of Shiva by Sri Ramakrishna. He was one. Suresh Babu and Girish Babu were the two others. They were men of powerful frames and of tremendous wills. They were given to drink and were what the world calls sinners. They came to the Master challenging him as it were. Indeed, one of them threatened him if he did not *make* him reform. The Master taught them how to attain spirituality by the gradual transformation of their desires and tendencies. Their sins fell off from them quite as naturally as they had been taken on. All of them became saintly in nature. Sri Ramakrishna had the faculty of speaking to each in his own language of thought. He spoke to sinners through their sins. He allowed all persons to approach him, even the most notorious men and women. For this reason, even as Christ was criticised, so was he. Verily, his grace and his message were specially for those whom a hypocritical world calls "sinners."

Then there is Mohendra Nath Gupta, who has made his name undying by having written "The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna" in English and in Bengali. His modesty and his desire to concede the writing of the book to the grace of the Master, did not allow him to sign his own name. The book is known as written by "M., A Son and Disciple of the Lord." He is in the front rank of Hindu society as an educator. He conducts a large school of a model type, known as "The Morton Institution". "M.," as he is known to thousands of readers, was the faithful observer of the life of his Master. But for him, some of the most celebrated utterances of Sri Ramakrishna and wonderful glimpses of his life might have been lost to posterity. There were numerous

other householder disciples beloved of the Master, a few of whose names may be mentioned at random here. They were Monomohan, Kedar, Chuni, Kishori, Debendra, Akshaya, Nabo Gopal, Atul, Naba Chaitanya, Mohendra Mukherjee, Priya Mukherjee, Haris Mustafi, Bepin, Nitya Gopal Goswami, Adhar, Baikuntha Sannyal, Upendra, Haramohan and others. Noren knew them intimately and loved them with his whole heart, regarding them as his own brothers. He sometimes may have had differences with one or other of them, but he was always loyal to them unto the end, regarding them with the deepest love, because of their belonging to the spiritual household of his Lord.

Amongst the younger disciples who became or had been householders, the most beloved of the Master was Purna Chandra Ghose. Of him the Master said that, if Noren was the pick of the mangoes, then this devotee was the next. Of this class of young disciples mention may be made at random of Norendra Nath Mitra whom the Master called "*Chota Noren*," Tarak of Belghoria, Bhavanath, Pramatha Nath Kar, Narayan, Nitya Gopal and others.

The deep links of relationship, between Noren and the disciples of his *Guru*, were forged into a chain of which he was the main link, and all the other disciples including those who became monks of the Order of Ramakrishna, were the neighbouring and connecting links. And the names of these boys,—for they were only boys then, with the exception of Gopal-Dā,—count as follows :—

There was Rakkhal, the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna, in a special sense, who became the Swami Brahmananda and the first abbot of the Order of Ramakrishna. There was Baburam, who became the Swami Premananda. There was Yogin, who became the Swami Yogananda. There was Nitya Niranjan, who became the Swami Niranjanananda. There was Sarat, who became the Swami Saradananda and who preached in America. He is the Secretary of the Ramakrishna Mission. There was Soshi, who wrote a treatise on agnosticism in his youth, who was the most untiring

attendant on the Master during his last illness, and whom the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna regarded as the embodiment of Hanuman Mahavira, the great servant of Rama. He became the Swami Ramakrishnananda and founder of the monastery and mission in Madras. There was Hari, who became the Swami Turiyananda and preached in America. There was old Gopal-Dâ, who became the Swami Advaitananda. There was Kali, who became the Swami Abhedananda and preached and organised a Vedanta Mission in America. There was Tarak, who became the Swami Shivananda and the President of the Ramakrishna Monastery in Benares. There was Gangadhar, who became the Swami Akhandananda and founded an Orphanage and an Industrial School for boys in Murshidabad District. There was Sarada, who became the Swami Trigunatita and preached and founded the First Hindu Temple in America. There was Latoo, who became the Swami Adbhutananda. There was Tulsi, who became the Swami Nirmalananda and the President of the Ramakrishna Monastery in Bangalore and who, likewise, worked in America. There was, also, Subodh, who became the Swami Subodhananda.

These were the chief Sannyâsin disciples of the Master. They venerate him as an Incarnation of the Divine Consciousness, for he had attained that. They have made over their lives to his cause because of their great love for him.

But there was one, who was the main disciple of the Master, even more so than Noren, in one sense. This was Sâradâ Devi, the Virgin-Wife of Sri Ramakrishna, the Holy Mother of the Order. She had long since forgotten that she was "wife." She thought of Sri Ramakrishna as "Guru-Deva," the "Divine Teacher." And he had responded by making her his own Mother in the spiritual sense. Speaking of her he would lose himself in humility, crying out, "Who am I ! She is the Incarnation of Motherhood. She is the Mother Herself !" He never deserted her, nor did she desert him. She often lived at Dakshineswar, in the company of women-disciples of the Master, occupying separate quarters from him.

This brings to mind those other great spiritual relationships devoid of the sex-idea as those of Jesus and Mary, the sister of Martha ; Buddha and his wife-disciple, Yasodhara ; St. Bernard and Santa Scholastica ; and Santa Clara and St. Francis of Assisi.

One of the disciples doubted the relationship of the Master with the Holy Mother. On one occasion it so happened that at the dead of night this disciple saw her serving Sri Ramakrishna. Unbeknown to them he watched them and was struck with reverence at what he saw, for, lo, the *Bhagavan* was addressing her in the ecstasy of *Bhāḍa*, as "Mother ! Mother !" Overcome with shame, the disciple did not visit the Master for some days. Then the Master sent for him and said, "It was well that you doubted. Unless you test me, how can you have faith in me !" The astonished disciple, who had not spoken of his experience to any one, was overcome when the Master read his mind. Thereafter, he became unalterably fixed in steadfast loyalty to the Master.

Daily Sri Ramakrishna instructed his Virgin-Wife in religious teaching ; and he made her the "Mother" of all his spiritual sons. And all of them are devoted to her as sons to a mother. If the Master revealed divinity to them, the "Mother" awakened, in many of the devotees, the personal consciousness of the divine nature. She has ordained and initiated many of the younger generation as lay and monastic disciples. Even some of the disciples of the Master, at his own personal advice, took initiation from her. Sri Ramakrishna made his disciples regard all women as Mother. Naturally, they looked upon Sarada Devi as the Divine Mother, even as the Master himself was accustomed to regard her.

Did anyone in the slightest manner offend her sense of delicacy and honour he was immediately outcasted from her presence. Sri Ramakrishna would say that the *woman* in her had been injured, adding that that is always dangerous. At one time when a remark of his had touched Sarada Devi and she left, weeping, he sent one of his young disciples after her, telling him that his devotion to God and his meditation would take

wings if she wept. For how could he who believed in divinity manifest everywhere, feel, without instant repentance, that he had vexed, even in the slightest way, one of the higher manifestations of the Divine Nature.

It was this rich human sentiment, this intense humanity in the Master's nature, reflected in his disciples, which made up the contents of that spiritual atmosphere in which they dwelt. Tenderness, sweetness, holiness, purity, religious devotion and spiritual exaltation were the background of colour against which the lives and characters of the Master and his disciples stood out as a masterpiece of spiritual revelation made incarnate, and of which some of the forms are still embodied. Humanity was transfigured into divinity by the transmission of the earnest search and great realisation of the Master to the disciples. Spiritual ecstasy took the place of the sensual pleasures of the world. And within the halo of their lives she, whom they venerated as the Mother, dwelt amongst them. She served them. She helped them in their spiritual practices. She sorrowed for any misfortune that might befall them. She was joyous when they had cause for joy. Though grown up, all the sons of the Master were as boys. Even Sri Ramakrishna possessed the unsophisticated and sweet nature of a boy. The disciples were all children in spirit, and she was the Mother in the temple of their heart. They refused to regard her otherwise than the incarnation of the Divine Mother Herself. In this manner she was unto all of them the spiritual complement to the Master. And in India, the wife of the *guru* is regarded, verily, as the *guru* himself. It arouses spiritual ecstasy to see venerable old men and those who are now famous as the Sannyāsins of the Order of Ramakrishna, prostrate themselves before her presence and seek her guidance in all matters of the Spirit in which she is an adept. Noren always sought her guidance and blessings. He bowed down before her in adoration. Her presence was an inspiration and a blessing to all of them. It would lift them all out of worldliness into that Radiant Innocence into which they were all re-born in having made

themselves the spiritual children of the Master. Noren's ideal of sublimated Manhood and Womanhood was the Master and the Mother. He venerated the Holy Mother even as he venerated his Master. Noren made them his real home, his sole refuge. And the disciples of the Master were his real friends, his relations, his brothers, his fellow-monks in that world of reality which was the Constant and Undying Presence of their Master and of their Mother—a Presence that endures—for it is of God and in God. Verily, it is Divine!



LI

IN THE GARDEN-HOUSE AT COSSIPUR.

Noren grew in power and spiritual vigour from day to day, while Sri Ramakrishna grew daily worse in health, although his mind and heart were the same divine flame, if anything greater in its luminousness and intensity. The disciples nursed him faithfully ; their devotion exceeded all human aspiration. They made their service to their *Guru*, literally, an act of divine worship. But nothing could stay the progress of his disease. The Master was commanded by the physicians not to try his voice in any way. He could not help, however, uttering words of the highest wisdom to the large number of religious aspirants who flocked to him at all hours. One is reminded of the dying Buddha, about to enter Nirvana, who, though suffering intense pain, insisted that the seeker for truth who had come to be shown the Noble Way in that last hour of the Lord, be not sent empty away. In His very dying moments the Tathâgata imparted the teaching both unto him and to the assembled disciples, telling them to work out their salvation with diligence and that decay was inherent in all component things. One is reminded of Jesus at the Last Supper teaching His doctrine in the hour when the anguish of the Days of the Passion had already entered His mind. Sri Ramakrishna instructed all who came to him, even when he was warned by the physicians that to utter one single word might bring on a sudden collapse, and even when it caused him pain to speak.

Day after day the body of the Master grew weaker and weaker. It was wasting away. It became like a skeleton. The lad Soshi, who became the Swami Ramakrishnananda served him most, though he alternately wept and felt bliss in the serving. The others were also present, and shared in the nursing. Sri Ramakrishna was practically alone with these young men who gathered about him as their divine teacher

and about Noren as their leader. At the urge of Noren all of them abandoned their homes for the time, and gave themselves up in loving and devoted service to Sri Ramakrishna. Such devotion! Such service! The most famous physicians were called in and recognised Sri Ramakrishna's case as hopeless. They came again and again, and so charmed were they by his personality and his words that they remained for hours with him forgetting all else. At one time a certain physician, desiring to examine the affected spot in Sri Ramakrishna's throat which was then intensely tender, was dumb-founded when he saw how the Master could take away his own consciousness from the body at will, so as to leave him free to do his work.

At this time the householder disciples came regularly, and there was constant conversation on religious subjects and sometimes singing. At this time, also, Sri Ramakrishna initiated his young disciples as monks. He gave them the *gerruâ* or seamless ochre robe to wear. He called Noren and four others to his side, asking them whether they could take a begging-bowl and beg their food. They consented immediately with enthusiasm; and with the name of the Lord upon their lips they arose and went forth to beg in the neighbourhood; and having collected raw materials they cooked the food and offered it to the Master. He was overjoyed to see these boys, the sons of gentlemen and of high caste, put on the ochre robe, the symbol of poverty and renunciation, and beg from door to door as did Lord Buddha in the days of old. This was the true spirit of monasticism, the renunciation of all pride of birth and pride of position, and the readiness to eat the coarsest food, if need be, and sleep wheresoever the on-coming night revealed a shelter. Aye, Sri Ramakrishna was the flame, and they were as the spiral, leaping tongues of that flame. He was a perfect Sannyâsin; and his disciples were full of the spirit of renunciation.

In the last days of the Master's life the disciples were wrought up to a pitch of agony and ecstasy. They were driven mad as it were, and literally threw themselves with

violence into meditation, *sādhanaś* and ascetic practices in order to drown their great grief and their terrible anxiety in the spiritual consciousness. When the Master suffered most, they too suffered intensely. Was the Master better, they too felt better. Noren often went wild with despair to think that he could do nothing to alleviate the physical pain of his loved one. One night, his emotional storm reached a maddened point. He took a vow to find if there was a Being to come to the aid of his suffering Master. Towards evening, he commenced to circumambulate the house, repeating the name of the Lord, "Rama ! Rama !" in a high and excited voice. His outward consciousness had apparently deserted him and he was full of ecstatic fire. Toward the latter part of the night the Master heard his voice, as it became louder and louder in the silent hours. He said to one near him, "Go ! Bring Noren here !" But Noren could not be stopped. For sometime he continued, until he was practically forced into the Master's presence. Sri Ramakrishna said to him lovingly, "My Noren ! It will avail you nothing to do this !" He knew that his time was coming near and that the Voice was calling him. He added, "Twelve years of my life were spent as you have been spending this night. They have gone by like a whirlwind. What can you, my boy, do in one night's effort ?"

The Cossipur Garden-house had become a Temple and a University Hall, in one. Pandits came. Philosophy was thrashed to shreds in the talking. Devotion rose high. Singing and chanting occupied the time, and Noren would say to the Master, "Sire ! Give me a medicine that will cure all the illness of my mind and heart." And the Master would send him to meditate, and Noren in the intensity of his mental vision had many realisations. Or the Master would ask him to sing, which he would do and rise to mountain heights of rapturous love for God. He had strange realisations even of the Master himself. Some time before, when Sri Ramakrishna told him, "Some people say that I am God," Noren answered, "Let thousands call you God. So

long as I do not know it for myself, I will not say so." The Master rejoiced. Yes, here he had a disciple who had the strength and courage of his own convictions. To doubt in this manner was to have the greatest faith. Noren would often say, "I do not even want God. I want peace. I want *Satyam, Jnanam, Anantam*," that is, Absolute Truth and Knowledge and Infinitude. Aye, and when he attained this supreme state in the full expansion of the spiritual consciousness, he verily understood Sri Ramakrishna, not only as a God-Man, but as the Man-God.

The heart of Noren, however, was wiser than his intellect. Both were made earnest and intense by the sincerity of his soul. Noren was a strange, complex, seemingly contradictory and yet, perfectly composite, simple and harmonious personality. He was a man of many moods, all equally spiritual in their intensity, alternating between the highest knowledge and the highest love, but always with one purpose in their character,—*realisation*. In one mood he desired Brahman; in another mood he desired to have the realisation of the Personal God. In the latter stage of feeling he would sing devotional songs for hours, and would throw himself into love for God and his Master. In one of these moods he said to Sri Ramakrishna, "Your will has become one with the Lord's!" This utterance came as answer to Sri Ramakrishna's statement when Rakhai, the future Swami Brahmananda, had prayed to him saying, "Do speak to the Lord, Sire, so that your body may abide in this world some time longer." Sri Ramakrishna had said, "The Lord shall do His Will!" Then Noren said as above, implying that the personality of the Master had become literally merged in the Divine Nature.

The Master explained himself a few days later, saying, "I now see that I and my Mother have become one, once for all. Here within myself are two persons, one is the Divine Mother, the other is the devotee. It is the second person who has been taken ill."

Noren struggled with himself. Little by little, he threw overboard the cargo of doubt into the sea of Love. He prac-

tised much meditation and redoubled his austerities. He centred all his thought upon God, demanding to see the Object of all love. And great waves of feeling stole over him, transferring him to regions of pure ecstasy. The time was to come when the soul of Noren would triumph, when he would have the culminating spiritual experience in the Nirvikalpa Samádhi, when he would see all truths in their separate relationship to That which is the Absolute Truth and the essence of Brahman. And coming down from that state, he would see divinity in every person—and, particularly, in him who was Sri Ramakrishna.

In one of these moods, he entered the Master's room. The disciples were conversing in low tones. Then the Master, arousing himself from deep meditation, said suddenly to Noren, "What do you think of me?" Noren responded, "Why, Sire, you are everything, verily, a hero, who has cut his way to the Reality with the sharp sword of discrimination and with a strength which the world cannot give!" Hearing this, the Master verging on Samádhi, touched his own heart, and then turning to Noren and the others said with divine blessedness of soul, "I see,—I realise that all that is—every conceivable thing—comes out of this!" And Noren with overwhelming emotion said, "Yes, I see that all things come out of Thee." In his intense emotion he had suddenly thought of the personality of Sri Ramakrishna and the Heart of Things as controvertible terms. Then he sang a song, the burden of which was that human life is transitory and that one should keep the mind steadfastly fixed upon the Lord alone.

About this time, one night Noren dreamt that Sri Ramakrishna came to him and said, "Come! I will show you the Gopi Radha!" Noren followed him. After having gone some distance, the Master turned to him and said, "Where else will you go?" Saying this, Sri Ramakrishna transformed himself into the beautiful personality and exquisite form of Radha herself. This so affected the conscious mind of Noren that whereas, formerly, he had only sung songs of the Brahmo

Samaj relating to the Formless Brahman, he now sang songs relating to the great spiritual love of Radha, the individual soul, for Sri Krishna, the Indwelling Beloved One. When he narrated this dream to his brother-disciples, they were amazed. One asked him, "Do you believe in the significance of this?" And Noren answered, "Surely I do."

Such were the days at Cossipur. The divine flame was burning brighter and brighter. The spirit of renunciation was growing more and more intense. During this period, Noren would see his "double" as it were, following upon the state of meditation. It would appear as one just like himself, of the same shape and form, and he wondered, "Who is this?" It would remain with him on some occasions for more than an hour. He would speak to it, and while he was in the very act of speaking, it also would speak to him. It would do exactly as he did. He would mock at it, and it would do likewise to him. When this first occurred, he told Sri Ramakrishna of it, and the Master passed it over lightly, saying, "It is only an incident in the higher stages of meditation."

It is interesting to notice the gradual strengthening of the bonds of relationship between Noren and his brother-disciples. They naturally looked up to him because of Sri Ramakrishna's high estimate of his spiritual worth. Then, too, he was the most intellectual of them all. He had combined reason and secular knowledge with his devotional nature; and thus he was more strongly fortified in the religious consciousness. Therefore whenever anyone challenged his Master's teaching and the monastic tendency of himself and his fellow-disciples Noren could support their position with irresistible force. And in speaking for himself, he also spoke for his fellow-disciples. It was he who fired them with a certain magnetism and power which emanated from his remarkable personality. Did any differences or difficulties arise they would come to him. Sri Ramakrishna had encouraged this. In fact, he had emphasised it in innumerable ways and on innumerable occasions. He told them all that Noren was their leader, and made them feel that the spiritual understanding of his chief

disciple should be their infallible spiritual guide in the days that were to come. And it is true that many of the disciples of the Master have understood him all the better through Noren. He explained that great life to them. Theirs was the path of Love. He would give them reasons for the intensification of their Love. His understanding of the Master was their understanding and strength. And Noren, it can be said with accuracy, regarded Sri Ramakrishna as the embodiment, the Incarnation of human striving and human realisation concerning the Divine Nature, and as a God-Man, and therefore as the Man-God.



LII

AT BUDDHA-GAYA AND GHAZIPUR.

The company of Sri Ramakrishna was a constant recital of the greatneses of Hinduism. Day after day, the glory of religion and the goal of human life would be explained in the simplest way, and assimilated through a speedy education and true understanding of the heart. And there would be the constant narrative of the saints and saviours of Hinduism. Now perhaps it would be the greatness of Rama, the glory of Krishna, the intellect of Sankaracharya, the devotion of Chaitanya, the heart of Kabir or Ramaprasad, or the power of Guru Nanak, and it would thrill the hearers in the telling of the tale by the devotees or by the Master himself. Then, perhaps, it would be the recital of the deeds of the epic heroes, such as Yudhishtira, Arjuna, Bhishma, Ravana, Hanuman Mahavira and others, which would hold the listeners spell-bound. The devotees would sit, surrounding the Master. Then, one would commence a story which would grow more and more interesting as the speaker proceeded ; and the Master would add, now and again, some illuminating remarks which stirred all into raptures. The end would always be the chanting of the praises of God or some Divine Incarnation, the Master taking the lead in the song and ecstasy.

In the Dakshineswar Garden it was always so. In the house and garden at Cossipur also the same themes swung hither and thither many times, touching the hearts of devotees. In this place all devotion seemed to accumulate, for with the Master lying deathly ill, the disciples doubled and trebled their austerities and their meditation on the highest things. Little time was now left before the closing of that book of inspiration which they had been constantly reading—the Life of Sri Ramakrishna. Thus, they literally devoured that spirituality which was the aspiration to and the realisation of the realities of the Hindu consciousness.

And at one time, shortly after the removal of the Master from Dakshineswar to Cossipur, the sole topic of meditation and of inspiration was the career and the gospel of the Lord Buddha, the Enlightened One. And the main speaker and inspirer was Noren. He had saturated himself with Buddhist lore. He had mastered the words of the Compassionate One. He had read the *Lalita Vistara*. He had familiarised himself with all the insight of the *Tripitakas*. For the time he was a Buddhist in spirit. The towering intellect of the Enlightened One, the eminent sanity of his views, his uncompromising demand for truth, his burning renunciation, his infinite heart, his wonderful compassion, his sweet and deep and luminous personality, his sublime morality, his power of getting at the heart of things and the manner in which he struck the balance between metaphysics and human character—all these had caught Noren up into a world of tremendous spiritual life. He forgot everything else for the time being. He would speak of nothing but the Lord Buddha. He would wander in mind through the days of the Buddhist eras, from the time when the divine beggar-monk had renounced his royalty to find the Truth, down to the glorious period of the Emperor Asoka and the hewing of rock-cave monasteries and the founding of great universities and seats of learning.

He often said that Lord Buddha had truly renounced. Surrounded by wealth and grandeur and with kingly pomp and power, and blessed with the devotion of a fond parent and the love of his young wife, the beautiful Yashodhara, his was a position which to forego was an act of divine renunciation. It was his compassion for mankind, his wonderful determination to find the Truth which was not to be shaken by death or fear or sorrow, that had forced him to become a wandering Bhikshu. He whose residence was of the most costly marble inlaid with jewels, whose apparel was imperial, whose food was that of kings, whose couch was of ivory and whose coffers were filled to overflowing with riches and treasures,—it was he whom Noren saw, in the vivid presentation of his thought, wandering with staff and begging-bowl, with the whole world

their anxiety from the Master ; but finally the news had to be told. What was their surprise when they found the Master quite calm in the matter ! He smiled. Yes, had Noren gone ? It mattered not ! He would be back soon, the Master said. And then he related to them the parable of the man and the peacock. The bird came daily to the garden of a certain man and he, glad to have it remain with him, gave a particle of opium to the peacock, mixing it with some food. Gradually, it formed an opium habit and felt very much out of sorts till it had the usual dose at a certain time of the day. Naturally, the bird came every day. And Sri Ramakrishna made a comparison, saying, "So it is with Noren. He has got a taste of *something* here which he will not find elsewhere and that will *make* him return. Where else shall he go ?" The Master was glad, for he felt in the depth of his insight that Noren would understand him and his worth all the more by the reason of the experiences he might gain. Like that restless bird of his parable which flew back to its nest on the mast of a ship after having roamed for miles and miles desirous of finding a better resting-place but getting none, Sri Ramakrishna knew that Noren would return to him. But the disciples feared that the burning renunciation which had come upon Noren in these days might have cast him and the two other disciples forth into the open road as wandering Sannyāsins. Perhaps they had gone to the Upper Provinces or to the Himalayas. No one knew.

And so about the beginning of the month of April in the year 1886, Noren, with the two brother-disciples, crossed the Ganges and reached the railway station at Bali. Here they remained, sleeping through the night where best they could. Now they were Sannyāsins in the real sense of wanderers. In the morning they took the train and were bound for Buddha-Gaya. All the way long Noren was steeped in thought concerning that great life which became illuminated for the good of the world at Buddha-Gaya. All the way long they were eager with anticipation ; and when the train came to a stop at Gaya, they were exultant. Buddha-Gaya

was some eight or nine miles distant, but that mattered not. They enjoyed the journey afoot. The train does not go to Buddha-Gaya, and it is well that it does not ; otherwise, the ancient peace and sweet stillness which linger in that place of pilgrimage would be disturbed by the noisy tumult of modern innovations.

Alighting from the train at Gaya, Noren suggested a bath in the sacred Falgu river. That done, and having rested after their *bhikshu*, they journeyed on, until at dusk they reached the place of Illumination of the World-honoured One. They spent the night there in an open hut built by some pious soul for the shelter of the passing pilgrims. A great part of the night was devoted to religious discourse upon the life and teachings of the Blessed One. In the morning they satisfied the great quest for which they had come. They visited the Temple of the Bodhisattva. They approached it with reverence and ecstasy. They fell prostrate before the Presence of the Lord. Aye, there He was as of old, the Compassionate One, the Master and Maker of Infinite Peace, He who spoke of Nirvana and the Silence. The three young pilgrims sat cross-legged, in the posture of *Padmasana*, in meditation before Lord Buddha, all-absorbed.

For two hours they sat thus in meditation. Then they arose and visited the monastery. The *Mohunta* was delighted with Noren and invited him and his *gurubhai*s to remain as long as it pleased them. When it was evening and all was silent and hushed, and when the quiet makes Buddha-Gaya shrouded in awesome solitude, Noren, taking his brother-disciples, repaired to the stone-seat under the most sacred Bodhi-Tree. There Noren entered the more concentrated and higher stages of meditation. The silence of the evening hour and the solemnity of his thought stirred the depths of his emotional nature. Suddenly, he burst into tears, and putting his arm about the *gurubhai* seated next to him, he embraced him with wonderful tenderness. Startled, the latter was about to ask the reason of this when he found Noren again plunged into deep meditation. Was it that,

meditating upon the career of the Tathâgata, he was lost in love at the thought of His compassion and his body responded, unconsciously, as if to clasp the Feet of the Lord in sacred overwhelming feeling ! Or, did his mind suddenly turn in anguish and in fear, and in greatest love as well, to the Garden-house at Cossipur and to his Master there ! One does not know, and Noren remained always silent as to the contents of that meditation. Be that as it may, surely, a JOYOUS REVELATION was granted to him. He might have touched the Presence of the Lord in the region of Nirvana, soaring thither on the wings of deepest thought !

For three days longer Noren remained at Buddha-Gaya. He had seen all the places sanctified by the touch of the Feet of the Lord. His intention soared, of a sudden, into a great resolve to continue his wanderings ; but the two other disciples were impatient to return, fearful of the sudden passing away of the Master. And their hearts were home-sick for him. Noren, too, had often visited, mentally, the Garden-house at Cossipur near the distant city of Calcutta, and felt himself in the presence of his Master, bowing at his Feet with great depth of heart. The other disciples who were in attendance upon the Master, likewise, yearned for the return of him whom they most loved. They became more and more anxious. Finally, they went to Sri Ramakrishna, praying that Noren might return. Drawing a circle upon the ground he said, "Farther than this Noren shall not go." He symbolised thereby, to the disciples, that his will would influence the events and thoughts of Noren's mind and that he would immediately return from the place where he might be at that time. Soon after Noren returned to Calcutta, unconsciously following the current of the Master's will and the great desire of his brother-disciples. When he came back to Cossipur, the Master's joy was boundless. Noren was made to tell all that he had seen, heard, felt and thought. The other disciples fell upon his neck and embraced him ; and they gave themselves up to singing and dancing in the name of the Lord, in the great joy which was theirs.

There was only one other time when Noren had gone out on pilgrimage, but that was a mere incident, for then the group of disciples were not bound by such close ties of love, and Noren himself was not so fully conscious of his relationship to Sri Ramakrishna nor of his divine humanity; and there was, also, no such great pain of separation, no such fearful anxiety that Noren would be lost in the divine wilderness of the wandering monastic life. He was still on the look-out for a Man of God. True, Sri Ramakrishna was a revelation to him, but still he must see for himself if there were saints greater than he. Besides, though he knew it not, this earlier pilgrimage was to be in the nature of a strange and remarkable test. He had heard of the famous saint Pāvharī Bābā, of Ghazipur. This saint was called "Pavhari" which signifies "eater of air," because of the extremely small quantity of food he allowed himself in his rigorous ascetic discipline. And monks in India are called "Bābā" which means, "Father!" To Ghazipur, therefore, Noren went on pilgrimage. Pāvharī Bābā had been lost to the world for many years. He had grown old in the ways of devotion unto God. He shut himself up in a cave and spent all his time in meditation. Noren prostrated himself and addressed him in terms of exalted respect. The saint said little. But when he heard that the young man before him was a disciple of the Mahātmā of Dakshineswar, he was transported with joy and treated him with great affection. Speaking of Sri Ramakrishna as an *Avatāra* his voice thrilled with feeling. He showed Noren a photograph of him which, he said, was a treasured possession of his, and that he had been worshipping it for some time. Noren bowed before it, lost in bewilderment. What was this! It was strange beyond reason!

This remarkable experience became a shadow of what he later knew, namely, that the Spirit of Sri Ramakrishna accompanied him everywhere. Aye, the Master dwelt in his heart. And always throughout his life wherever he went, he felt the Presence of his Master, the Bhagavān Sri Ramakrishna.

LIII

IN THE NIRVIKALPA SAMADHI.

Like a terrific peal of thunder, deafening the hearing to all other sound and startling the consciousness of sense into a strange and tense stillness ; like a great burning thought fierce with meaning which, entering the mind, paralyses all other thinking, even so is the opening experience of the terrible glory of the Nirvikalpa Samādhi, the absolute transfixing of human personality into Divinity. It is the falling to pieces of the foundations of personality, the tremendous bursting of effulgence which annihilates all the darkness of sense and thought. It is the drowning of personality in the ocean of that True Individuality which is God.

And like the awesome silence which follows upon the violence of the tropical storm, like the almost-audible silence which reigns in the glorious solitude of mountain fastnesses, like the great stillness of the sea after the mad dash of waves has broken in thundering noise upon the shore, like the silence of the stars, and like unto the peace of all these, is the inexpressible condition of the Nirvikalpa Samādhi. The body is lifeless. More lifeless is the mind. It is all stillness. It is all wonderful stillness, this side of Maya. The structure of thought and sense, built through the time and effort of innumerable lives, has tumbled to pieces, and is now only a heap of ruins. This is how Lord Buddha spoke of it,—as the breaking down of the ridge-pole of that tabernacle of thought and form in which the soul has made its abode for uncountable ages. But on the other side of Maya it is Effulgence, Sublime Effulgence, the Infinite Effulgence of Divinity. The phenomenon of personality, having become extinct, only divinity remains. Only reality remains. Then only Brahman IS.

The Vedas say that only those who are born for the welfare of humankind can return from the highest Samādhi. Otherwise, the soul entering the Ocean of Divinity, leaves

the body behind—a mere corpse. And for those who work, going beyond the limitations of the memory of the experience of the Nirvikalpa Samādhi, it translates itself into a complete saturation of personality with omnipotent power, leaving a glow of divinity across the human consciousness of the saint. That is why the message of one who has been in the highest state is overpowering. When the wheel of the Law has turned round for the last time, in the final spending of the force wherewith it was whirling, that which is death to the body becomes, to the personality, a renewal of the Infinite Consciousness, aye, and a permanent abiding therein.

In the Nirvikalpa Samādhi, the essence, the Brahman in all things reveals itself. Coming out from this experience, Beauty, Art, Science, and all that which is divine as the essence of human knowing and striving, appear as rays of various light in the rainbow of that Divine Transcendent Consciousness. Coming out from this experience, the saint sees Brahman, in a super-exalted manner of feeling, in everything, saying, "Verily Art is Brahman ; verily Science is Brahman ; verily all Glory, all Magnificence, all Greatness is Brahman."

Sri Ramakrishna was the arch-poseessor of this experience and of the consciousness to which it is the key. His Samādhi was of many forms. Sometimes it would be semi-conscious, at others, quite conscious, at others, again, super-conscious. Sometimes he would *will* himself into them. At other times, the strong currents of his spiritual and emotional nature would sweep his personality into them in spite of himself. At a moment's will he could rend the veils which separate the various spheres of consciousness and enter a condition of "Pure Mono-ideism", wherein all the activities of thought and feeling, all the sense of "I" and of space and time and of the relative world at large were suspended, and in that exalted state of perception he became merged in the Absolute. There were times also when he entered "a world of power," or "a world of beauty", or "a world of spiritual grandeur," according as the nature of the suggestion from the external world might be. Or there were times when

he would speak with invisible beings, with such as he accosted as Gods, or with those who were regarded as the Divine Incarnations of the past. He would literally commune, in these times, with Christ and with Sri Krishna and with the various Forms of the Mother. The awe-struck disciples would be translated into ecstasy; and he would verify his experiences to them in innumerable ways of unimpeachable test. He was a saint of the highest spiritual order. The word saint does not convey the full meaning of the measure of his personality. He was a seer who spoke with the Object of all seeing, and who entered into the infinite contents of that Object, aye, who literally became the Subject of that Object when his Samādhi consciousness rose to its highest level.

Noren also was awe-struck. He wondered at Sri Ramakrishna. Yes, this was the goal,—the actual seeing, the knowing which *is* vision, the seeing and the knowing which are the actual *becoming* and, finally, the actual *being*. He must attain this goal. He felt that the actual personal experience would be the infallible solution; and so he must have it. To become possessed of those same moods of spiritual insight and consciousness as were his Master's—this was his ideal and resolve. Naturally, though he could not hope to have the same number or the same intensity of experiences,—for that had come to Sri Ramakrishna only after immeasurable efforts and *tapasyā*—yet his whole soul panted to taste the waters of that living consciousness and remain absorbed in it. He desired the Nirvikalpa Samādhi, the crowning height of Sri Ramakrishna's personal and super-personal consciousness.

Indeed, this was what Noren sought of Sri Ramakrishna, the very crest and glory of his spiritual realisations. It was by no means a paltry quest. What must he have thought of Sri Ramakrishna to make him feel that the Master could give him this state of super-consciousness! He was literally begging Sri Ramakrishna for this, ever since the Master had initiated him into the intellectual and spiritual awareness of the Advaita Vedānta. "To feel divinity; to find the

whole of nature erased from the tablets of perception ; to have the 'little—I' which created all the bondage of the soul robbed of any and every objective characteristic and attitude of being, to plunge into the Region of True Being even beyond thought"—such was the prayer of Noren to Sri Ramakrishna. And what a prayer it was !

The experience of the Nirvikalpa Samādhi can be called a terrible glory, because it is spiritually and humanly speaking the most awe-inspiring and sublime of experiences. In that state the soul has dropped off the carcass of thought and of form. Who knows that state ! Only he who has entered it ! This is the Divinity beyond divinity. No wonder that the saint who experiences this condition of Being is declared by the Vedas to be greater than even Brahmā, the Creator of the Universe, and that all the gods adore such an one.

What are all minor realisations but drops of water to the soul which thirsts for the Living Waters of the Ocean of Realisation ! Noren had seen forms, in the state of meditation, notably one of a *Yogi* clothed in *gerrua*. He opened his eyes, but still the image remained. Such realisation was still in and of form. He wanted to go beyond all objective realisation. He wanted to strike the bottom of the sea of Consciousness and make its hidden treasure his own. What were the foaming revelations on the surface but a child's pastime to him ! He wanted to realise for himself the very Spirit of the Upanishads. He wanted to be able to say, in very truth, that which is the last utterance of the human soul and the first note of the thundering consciousness of Divinity, "*Aham Brahmdsmi* !"—"I am Brahman !" "*Shivoham* !" "*Shivoham* !"—"I am Shiva !" "I am the Absolute !"

The other disciples were awe-struck at this daring and insistent demand of Norendra. They could not soar into that great region of divine emotion in which he breathed. In these Cossipur days he was more than a giant, spiritually. He was a living flame of spirituality. His very appearance proved it to be so. Aye, he walked like a lion ; and his strength was that he was the spiritual son of Sri Ramakrishna.

the child of the Mother. The Master himself, in the spiritual vision he had of Norendra, saw and spoke of him thus: "Even the Maya of the Divine Mother Herself cannot approach him!" There was the Shiva-nature in him! "And when Shiva comes, the gods tear the world in shreds. The Night of Brahmá is at hand. The *Mahápralaya* draws near. The universe enters the state of equilibrium. The Great Nothingness of Divinity alone is!"—so say the scriptures. Shiva-Brahman dwells as the Spiritual Essence in all; and Noren was wondrously manifesting it. At this time, when Noren rested in sleep, the Master would tell the other disciples that his sleep was only in seeming, that in reality, it was a state of meditation; and he would speak of the growing degree of insight the mind of Noren attained, while the body reposed thus in unconsciousness.

Intense renunciation came to him at this time. Being instructed by Sri Ramakrishna, he went through various *sádhaks*, or ascetic spiritual practices. He spent whole nights before a *dhuni* or fire, under a tree in the garden. The Cossipur garden became a *Tirtha* or place of pilgrimage. With Sri Ramakrishna lying ill in the upper story, the house itself seemed a temple and he, the Presence. Noren went one day to the Master and said what he had repeatedly said before, "Sire! Do give me the Nirvikalpa Samádhi!" Sri Ramakrishna, broken in health, but more than ever radiant in soul, replied, "When I am well, I shall give you everything you ask of me." Noren insisted, "But if you pass away, what can I get!" Sri Ramakrishna made answer, as if in a soliloquy, "What is he speaking?" Was he hurt by the littleness of the faith of his disciple, as if life or death mattered anything in the way of helping his disciple? Did not Noren know that it did not depend upon his physical presence? Then he said quietly, "Well, my boy, what do you want?" Noren replied, "Sire, I wish to remain immersed in Samádhi like Sukadeva, for five or six days at a time, and then to return to the sense-plane for a short while if only to maintain the body, and then

revert to that state of blessedness." Sri Ramakrishna grew impatient, saying, "Fie ! For shame ! You are such a big-receptacle. Does it befit you to speak like that ! I thought that you were like a huge banyan-tree and would give shelter to thousands of weary souls. Instead of that you are seeking for your own *mukti*, your own salvation ! Do not think of such small things, my boy ! How can you be satisfied with such a one-sided ideal ? My *forte* is all-sidedness. I should like to enjoy fish, for instance, in a variety of ways—such as, fried, boiled, made into soup and pickled. I enjoy the Lord not only in His unconditioned state of Oneness as Absolute Brahman, in Samādhi, but also in His various Blessed Forms through sweet human relationships. So do thou likewise. Be a *Jñāni* and a *Bhakta* in one !"

At this reprimand of the Master, Noren burst into tears. He understood at once. It was not that the Master desired that he should not have the highest spiritual consciousness and experience. It was because he did not want him to remain immersed in that state, when millions of human beings were sunk in ignorance of the Highest Religion. Sri Ramakrishna knew that Noren was a soul to feel for others, to think for others and to labour for the salvation of mankind. The Master would give him the highest realisation, but the disciple was not to bury within the confines of his personality the treasures it revealed. He was to go forth into the world and teach the Gospel which is the Spiritual Word of that Radiant Life. He was to become a banyan-tree, giving shelter to many souls. He was to be the fountain from which many, many souls would draw the waters of life.

According to Sri Ramakrishna there are two kinds of *Mahāpurushas*, or Great Souls. There are those who remain immovably fixed in Brahman and whose illumination silently permeates the whole world of thought and aspiration. Then, there are those who, having attained the consciousness of Brahman, live in the world, translating the Highest Knowledge into the Highest Service. The Beatitude of the Divine Consciousness in their cases, is transformed into the

Saving Compassion to aid in the Redemption of the World. These are the World-Teachers. Noren's drift and tendency as Sri Ramakrishna saw, was of the former description, but his real nature was that of the latter. So Sri Ramakrishna was right in holding that he should become a veritable banyan-tree under whose spreading branches the weary and heavy-laden in soul might rest. He should be like a sun, revealing the glory of that consciousness in which he desired to enter. Sri Ramakrishna was, therefore, impatient when his disciple had expressed the desire to make of the highest state of Being a purely personal achievement and realisation, not counting the value of his illumination in the helping of others. So he said, "I thought that you were born for better things than to remain for five or six days at a time in Samādhi." This was one of the few times when Sri Ramakrishna was severe with his disciple. Though he loved him as he loved his own realisation, he felt it necessary to rebuke him and make him feel the worthlessness and selfishness of such realisation which is kept pent up within as personal salvation. Such personal salvation, he held, was all right in the case of others as the highest goal of human aspiration ; but for a soul like Noren whom he called a *Nitya-Siddha* and an *Acharyakoti*, such idea of personal salvation was beneath his dignity to centre his heart upon. Does a king's son care to earn by the sweat of his brow a few hundred rupees which may be a fortune and the highest ambition for a day-labourer to achieve ? He can only do so if he is ignorant of his real position and the higher mission of his life. So Sri Ramakrishna did not want Noren to be ensnared by that form of *Māyā*.

But, even as Noren had asked, even so was he to have the Nirvikalpa Samādhi. It was to transfigure and transfix his personality, and to throw him back upon the shores of human life, as a Great Soul, a Master of Compassion, one in whom the slightest shade of even spiritual selfishness was to be absolutely blotted out, and he to come forth as one of the

Effulgent Ones who are aware of their true nature and their great mission in life.

It came one evening unexpectedly and with divine power! Noren was meditating in a lying posture. Suddenly he felt that there was a great light at the back of his head. It became effulgent. His mind merged in it. What then transpired in his consciousness was beyond words. Verily, the stars were blotted out, the heavens were flung back, the universe rolled away, revealing to him the Supreme Glory of God. Everything began to dissolve, as it were, and to twist out of shape. The highest consciousness had come upon him, quite unawares. Whenever he saw the light, he paid little attention to it. He had often seen it. But when the effulgence came this time, it came with omnipotence. It stunned the consciousness of personality ; and the "I" of him became merged in Divinity. There are no words to describe that state ! To those only who possess the mystical consciousness, the condition of Noren will be comprehensible. He himself, sometime after this realisation, composed a poem called "The Hymn of Samādhi," which best illustrates the exalted condition of trans-personality into which he had entered. It reads in the translation,—

Lo ! The sun is not, nor the comely moon.
All light extinct ; in the great void of space
Floats, shadow-like, the image universe.

In the void of mind, involute, there floats
The fleeting universe, rises and floats,
Sinks again, ceaseless, in the current "I."

Slowly, slowly, the shadow multitude
Entered the primal womb, and flowed ceaseless,
The only current, the "I am," "I am."

Lo ! 'Tis stopped, ev'n that current flows no more,
Void merged into void,—beyond speech and mind !
Whose heart understands, he verily does.

Aye, in that consciousness, time had faded out ; form had

vanished ; eternity was ; Infinity alone was. Consciousness had ascended like a flame which swept in and out, and out and in, all ideas and states the mind had ever known. It burned up every atom of objectivity and then plunged into an ocean of subjectivity,—where sensation became beatitude. Noren was in blessedness. As the light came to him, he seemed to pass through many spheres of being ; but then, soon all was blotted out. Only Brahman was. This was the grand destruction of Personality which he had desired so long, the destruction of Personality which is the Finding of God.

Noren has ascended the mountain-top of realisation. Indeed, in this sublime soaring beyond, the name Noren sounds false ; even the name is lost. If one might make such a comparison, the soul ascended as a perfect, symmetrical figure of spiritual inwardness, touching the divinity at all angles and points of consciousness, until it soared high above all objective characteristics, into the pure and free region of utmost subjectivity.

When Noren entered the Nirvikalpa Samādhi, his mind was startled by that Terrible Glory. His body trembled as though it had sustained an agonising shock of joy. His soul passed into a state of Vibrant and Tempestuous Rapture, from which it passed into a state of Divine Bewilderment, when it seemed as if all ideas, impressions and images were falling out of the vessel of his mind. From this state of Divine Bewilderment his soul passed into that of the Utmost Ecstasy, when it seemed that his whole personality was being saturated with Divinity and the Divine Consciousness, until personality vanished and Divinity remained. Finally, as the climax of all these awesome reachings-out of personality his soul passed, as a Great Light, from the state of Utmost Ecstasy into the Infinite Stillness of Peace.

"Whose heart understands, verily he knows."

Om Tat Sat !

Everything had been quiet on that night of the Nirvikalpa Samādhi. The other disciples were in meditation ; some were

with the Master, nursing him. It was all still and quiet. In a distant corner of the garden some were singing in soft tones. The elderly Gopal-Dâ was seated in meditation in the same room with Noren. Suddenly he sprang to his feet. His mind had been thrown from the heights of thought by a strange, anxious cry which he knew, instantly, to be the voice of Noren. And then there struck upon his ears, the words, "O Gopal-Dâ, O Gopal-Dâ, where is my body? Where is my body?" Gopal-Dâ was as if suddenly terror-struck and screamed out, "Why, Noren, there it is! It is there!" He hastened to him and found him lying prostrate. His body was rigid. He might have just died judging from his lifeless appearance.

Gopal-Dâ did not know what to make of this! Was it death! Whatever it might be, a holy awe seized him. He called out to the others, crying, "Come! Come quickly! Something has happened to Noren!" Immediately some dozen voices answered him, "What has happened? What has happened to Noren?" When they came up, Gopal-Dâ pointed to the seemingly lifeless body before him, saying, "See!" It was incomprehensible to them. A Sublime Positive Nothingness was written on the countenance of the chief disciple. His eyes were turned inwardly. The disciples were anxious beyond words. They shouted Noren's name. They shook the body; they found the breath had stopped. Then they massaged his limbs and endeavoured by artificial means to induce respiration, but without success. "What! Was Noren dead then?" The thought struck each mind with sudden violence; but none dared to speak that which he thought. They waited and worked. The minutes seemed hours. Indeed, the moorings of the consciousness of sense must have drifted far away for the body of Noren to have been plunged into such apparent lifelessness.

The suspense grew terrible. It was no longer endurable. One whispered, "Is he dead!" Then all said, as if in the same tense state of mind, and with one voice, "Come, let us go to the Master!" Only two or three remained with the body. The others hastened to the upper story.

When the disciples entered the room of the Master he was in a state of intense calm and his countenance was deeply serious. He seemed to have had foreknowledge of what had happened. They spoke hurriedly and excitedly at one and the same time. Then Sri Ramakrishna smiled. And turning to Gopal-Dâ who had come as the leader, he said, "Let him be! Let him be! He has teased me long to reach that state." The Master appeared in that moment as the Incarnation of Power Itself. Assured by the words and the attitude of the Bhagavân, the disciples returned and watched over the body of Noren, confident that all would be well with him.

Until nine o'clock at night he lay in that sublime state. After that time he showed faint signs of returning to consciousness. The disciples were overjoyed. One hastened to Sri Ramakrishna with the news. The others laboured in loving service over the body, stimulating it into quicker resuscitation by constant massage. They called him by name; their voices sounded in his ears now as if coming from a long distance. Louder and clearer the voices became to his awakening physical personality. He was as if drifting from some far, far-off sphere on a flood of ecstasy, the currents of which were returning him gently to the consciousness of sense and to the awareness of the bodily form. He did not seem inclined to rouse himself. He was at peace. The voices about him seemed to jar somewhat upon his great calm.

It is certain that but for the excitement and effort of those about him to bring him back, Noren would have remained much longer in that abstracted, subjective state. However, he came to consciousness suddenly, as if a strong force had pushed him forth. But still he was dazed for a time. Then he gave out an exclamation of rapturous joy, crying out, "O, What has happened!" The brother-disciples spoke hurriedly and loudly as if to hold his mind from reverting to that state out of which he had just come. Though physical consciousness had returned, the soul of him still had glimpses in the memory of this experience. Had the onrush of memory not been checked by their over-zealous efforts, he would have

gone back to that super-conscious condition again. Thus the stream of memory was diverted, becoming transformed into a radiance of emotion and beatitude. His heart was full to overflow with ecstasy. His eyes shone with super-human glory. There was a Divine Meaning in them. His fellow-disciples were caught up in the swing of his ecstatic consciousness. His body was tremulant with sensations of blessedness. He was literally radiant.

His heart was too full to speak. His mind was saturated, as it were, with light. He felt a lightness of the body as well. The heart knows ; the mind can only guess ; and the lips stammer in the attempt at expression. A sense of great mental and physical invigoration came over him. In this beatific consciousness he arose ; his feet naturally took the direction towards the upper story and to the room of the Master. He did not know whether he was ascending the stairs or not. He entered the room. The Master understood immediately. Looking deeply into the eyes of his disciple, Sri Ramakrishna said, "Now, then, Mother has shown you everything. Just as the treasure is locked up in the box, so will this realisation you have just had be kept under lock, and the key remains with me. Now you have work to do. When you have finished my work, the treasure-box will be again unlocked ; and you will know everything even as you have just known." He then admonished him to be careful of his body for some time and to exercise the utmost discrimination in his choice of food and companions, accepting only the purest.

Speaking to the other disciples Sri Ramakrishna said that it was fortunate that Noren should have emerged so quickly from the state of the Nirvikalpa Samādhi. Indeed, there is a great danger involved, for the body not being able to contain such intensity of emotion and concentration of personality during the suspension of normal consciousness may be overcome and final emancipation through death may ensue. In fact, when many of the saints reach the highest condition of the Nirvikalpa Samādhi, the body dies, and this is *Nirvāṇa*. The memory of Sri Ramakrishna went back across the years to

the time of his own Nirvikalpa Samâdhi in the presence of Nangtâ, the naked one, the sage Tota Puri. He understood. Aye, only he and only Noren understood.

That night there was much song, and until early morning the disciples sat in meditation. A peculiar spiritual atmosphere of power and ecstasy remained throughout the night, and there was much interchange of thought between the disciples as to the experience of Noren. Some spoke with bated breath, while others spoke aloud and joyously. During the night Sri Ramakrishna told his disciples, "Noren will pass away only of his own will. The moment Noren realises *who he is*, he will refuse to stay a moment longer in the body. The time will come when he will shake the world to its foundations through the strength of his intellectual and spiritual powers!" And then turning into the depth of his own soul, the Master prayed to the Divine Mother, "O Mother! Keep this realisation of Advaita-Jnana covered up in Noren! I have much work to be done by him!" Indeed, for all the other disciples Sri Ramakrishna prayed to his Mother that they might be completely emancipated. Their duty was to meditate and to conserve the spiritual power transmitted to them so that they might be out of Mâyâ's sway. But for Noren he prayed that he might have some Mâyâ in him so as to be able to do work for others, which was possible only if he had the "I," the illumined "I," not merged in the Absolute. Noren's experience of Samâdhi that night, bound his *gurbhais* irrevocably to him. Noren was to them, from that night, the possessor of the spiritual consciousness of Sri Ramakrishna himself. This had been the culminating experience for Noren, but the contents were shrouded in the Sublime Silence,—for, no mortal hearing can fathom that Unvibrated Sound which is the Silence of Nirvana.

What had brought on the determination of Sri Ramakrishna to allow his disciple to become conscious of the State of Brahman was, as has been seen, the overwhelming desire of Noren to realise It. The intention of the Master was to throw the personality of his disciple from the pinnacle of the

Nirvikalpa Samādhi into the exalted sphere of Compassion and Work. Noren had begged the Master for the blessedness of Supreme Samādhi, and the Master had said, "I thought *you* were longing for better things," meaning thereby that he believed Noren would forego even the highest personal blessedness in order to help mankind. In the remark one hears anew, though under the covering of a different language, the desire Sri Ramakrishna himself possessed to help the world. Often when he would be carried away into Samādhi he would create some forced desire, most simple and childlike in its nature, and repeat it insistently so that there might be a chance left for him to return to normal consciousness, without being merged in the Absolute Brahman, and help mankind. Thus, he would say,—*"I—I—I shall smoke," "I—I shall have potato fry"* And again, descending from the state of superconscious insight he would often utter the words, *"Mother, take away this consciousness from me! It hinders me from helping mankind. Keep me in the normal state so that I may be more actively useful to the world. And once when told that he should not be so anxious to bring others to God, he turned upon the speaker and said, "Let me be born again and again, even as a dog, if only I can be of help to one single soul!"*

It was through his realisation of the divine value of selfless, compassionate work that Noren earnestly took upon himself the desire to be of service to men. Echoing from a distant historic day come the words of one of the Arhat-Buddhas, who also forewent the state of Nirvana, saying, *"I shall not enter the region of Nirvana until each single being reaches the Buddhahood!"* One is thus reminded of the Great Compassion of the Buddha, whose search for Final Truth was in no way personal, but prompted by an infinite desire, a divine feeling to help mankind. And one finds this verified again and again in the lives of these Princes of Men, who see the Divine Unity in the manifoldness of life and try to throw across the consciousness of the manifold the Substance of Sameness which is the Divine Nature realised. They serve and see God in the downtrodden and the afflicted, in the

ignorant and in the poverty-stricken, in the needy and in the sick. They translate the subjective vision into objective service. They see God with their hearts as well as with their enlightened intellect. They see Him under the covering of limited and afflicted human personality as well as in the Abstract Revelation of the Infinite Subjective Consciousness, which is Para-Brahman.

And of all this the echo comes from the shores of the Lake of Galilee in the language of Jesus the Christ, "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy-laden and I will give you rest!" It is heard centuries before on the battle-field of Kurukshetra in the thundering utterance of Sri Krishna, "This world, My Mâyâ, is Divine, made up of all qualities and very difficult to cross. Yet those that come unto Me, verily, they cross the river of life!" That same Voice re-echoes in the present day in the sublime longing of Sri Ramakrishna to serve and to teach men, which he did even when it became intense pain for him to speak and even when he knew that it endangered his life. It re-echoes, again and again, in the service and the message of the Swami Vivekananda.

Sri Ramakrishna saw deep beneath the personality of Noren. And because he saw that the tendency of his disciple was to soar aloft through meditation into the Nirvikalpa Samâdhi, he prayed to the Mother to throw a veil of a different consciousness over him, so that he might work. But he said of that veil, "It is *so thin, so very thin*. At any moment it may be rent!"



LIV

NIRVANA.

The days passed from month to month in devotion, in service, in sorrow, in ecstasy, Noren leading and the others following even as disciples. Only several days were left—and then the soul of Sri Ramakrishna would pass into Nirvana, the Infinite Realisation. The time was coming when the light of this great life was to become extinct, humanly speaking, and the cage of the body was to be broken. The disciples were untiring in their attention in spite of sleepless nights and busy days. The Master was departing. What mattered it if their own bodies went in service. In August of the year 1886, people came and went by scores. It seemed as if all who had ever known the Master felt instinctively that the end was drawing near, and amongst them Noren most of all. He understood the illness of Sri Ramakrishna in a very deep sense. He thought—and the thought overwhelmed him—could it, could it be, as the Master said, that his body had been passing through such great pain and was now verging even upon extinction because of his taking upon himself the sins of those whom he had made his disciples. One is reminded, in this connection, of that other Oriental Teacher, Jesus the Christ, who felt that virtue had passed out from him into one of the multitude who had touched the hem of His garment. Floods of feeling drowned Noren's whole personality in unutterable sorrow but also in an ineffable spiritual consciousness,—sorrow because of the sense of approaching separation, and a spiritual consciousness because of the knowledge that he had been made the particular heir to that spiritual inheritance. In the latter mood he would feel an inexhaustible sense of power, realising in a luminous way that the Master could never die, even though the body passed into death.

He remembered that two years and six months back the Master had made him over to the Mother. Sri Ramakrishna, like the great Guru Nanak, had been waiting years and years for that disciple to come unto whom he could give the whole treasure of his realisation and then depart. The Swami Vivekananda used to say, "From the time in which he made me over to the Mother, he retained his vigour of health for only six months. The rest of the time he suffered." Indeed, the power of the Master was being diverted into a new channel. His own personality was becoming gradually re-incarnated, as it were, in the growing illumination of his chief disciple. And for such a re-incarnation the body and mind of Noren had been prepared through more than four years of spiritual training. He was, above all others, the fit vehicle for the full manifestation of that which was his Master's realisation. The Soul of the Master was soon to become merged in the Ideal about which his personality had constantly centred,—*The Mother!*

Towards the close of the month of July, Sri Ramakrishna could hardly converse. He would speak in a whisper, or else would designate by signs that which he desired to communicate. The disciples were grief-stricken when not engaged in religious exercise and discourse. They spoke of the Master with bated breath, fearing lest that which they thought might come to pass. He, their father, their guide, he who loved them all as a mother loves her own children, he who bore patiently with them, he who would have given up his own life for them, was sinking daily beyond all hope of recovery. Already they felt the sorrow which was to be theirs—all too soon. All the disciples, but particularly Noren, had been dear and affectionately intimate with the Master. They loved every shade of his personality. They looked upon his body as *chinmaya*, or all Spirit. The Swami Vivekananda speaking of him in his later life said very frequently, "Why speak of refinement! I have not yet found anyone more refined in soul than my Master. His manners of walking, of talking, resting, sitting, seeing his

arrangement of things in his room, his practical common sense—all were beautiful and perfect!" The disciples had really made him their own. He had really made them his own. They prayed that he might dwell longer with them, but he would say, "The Lord shall do His Will!"

Noren, at this time, was the power of meditation incarnate. One day, Girish Babu had asked him to sit with him in meditation. He consenting, they repaired to a tree where they seated themselves. There were mosquitoes without number and they disturbed the lay-disciple of Sri Ramakrishna to such an extent that he became restless. He opened his eyes and to his speechless amazement saw that Noren's body was covered as with a dark blanket, so vast was the number of mosquitoes upon him! He called and called him, but without getting any response. Finally he jerked him, and yet there was not the slightest consciousness. In his consternation he dragged him off the seat, but he fell to the ground with a thud. His body had become stiff as in death, in that meditation posture, without any signs of outward consciousness. When the force of the meditation relaxed, Noren returned to his normal state.

Often, often the Master would call the young disciples to his side, carressing them lovingly, speaking eloquently by signs of that which he felt for them. He often thought what would become of them without him. But then, there was Noren! And two days before his passing, Sri Ramakrishna called him to his side and addressing him concerning those other disciples who were to become the monks of the Order of Sri Ramakrishna, said, as best as his voice allowed him, "See! Noren! I leave all these, my children, in your care. You are the wisest and the ablest of them all. Guide them with love, and work for me!" One recalls another Son of God giving the care of his spiritual flock into the keeping of Peter, the disciple, the rock upon whom He was to found His Church. Verily, Noren was the rock and the Master had singled him out as the one upon whom to build the structure of the Modern

Gospel of the Religion Eternal, as he himself had realised it and as he knew it was to be interpreted and preached by his chief disciple. Noren was overcome with emotion. A feeling of the utmost humility came over him. Tears were in his eyes. He could not speak. Yes, this was a tacit assurance even from the Master's own lips that the time for the Great Deliverance was near at hand. Noren left the room, his throat choked with feeling, and when alone he gave himself up to grief.

There they were—the young disciples. He looked at them lovingly and with a sense of utmost oneness with them and their future destiny. He felt a great responsibility settling itself upon him. In a few hours he was weighed down, as it were, by the burden laid upon his shoulders by the Master and with his own great grief. He recalled all the words that the Master had ever spoken concerning them and himself. And there—under the shadow of the house at Cossipur and in one of the most soul-stirring moments of his life—he resolved to carry out the Master's command to him. He would live for them; he would beg for them; he would go to any length for any one of them, even to this that he would lay down his life for them. "And greater love hath no man than this." His life was the fulfilment of that great resolve. He remained loyal to them to the end. Never was there such love as he had for them; and they responded with a similar intensity of affection and regard. Verily, they came to look upon Noren as the mouthpiece of the Master.

It so happened that Noren had been called to the side of the Master some days earlier. At that time the suffering of Sri Ramakrishna was intense. He could hardly speak. He was getting weaker and weaker. But now that the last days were approaching he set himself with greater energy than ever to mould the religious life of his boy-devotees, particularly that of Noren, in a calm and silent way. Noren was the chief. Therefore, he did more for him; indeed, he literally transmitted his own powers to him. Every evening he called Noren to his room and asking the others to go out,

he would impart final instructions to him on various spiritual practices for two or three hours at a time, and advise him how to keep together his brother-disciples, how to train and guide them in the future, so that they could live the life of renunciation, and so on. When Noren had entered the room on this particular evening and sat with his *gurbhais*, the Master wrote on a piece of paper, "Norendra will teach others." The disciple, however, hesitated and said, "I won't do that!" Then Sri Ramakrishna summoning his strength in a great effort to speak insisted, saying, "You *have* to do it! Your very bones will *make* you do it!" Sometime before he had told Noren, "My *Siddhis* (Yoga powers) will be manifested through you in time!" meaning thereby, that Noren in later years as a teacher, would in a miraculous way turn many of the most worldly-minded to the spiritual life.

It was now only three or four days before the Master's *mahā-samādhi*. Everything was at the highest emotional pitch; as has been said, the young disciples were practising religious austerities and were in constant attendance upon the Master. The thought of the Master's probable departure unnerved Noren. Sometimes he would bury his grief in song. Then he would enter the Master's room and, looking upon the drawn face of Sri Ramakrishna his heart would break. On this day the Master seeing him alone and in deep thought, called him to his side. Asking him to close the doors of the room, Sri Ramakrishna bade his disciple to be seated near him and to meditate. They were alone. The other disciples wondered as to what was passing between them.

There was only one other time when Noren was thus alone with his Master; and that was when, as the Swami Vivekananda, he entered the meditation-room of the Belur Math, shutting all the windows and doors, and in the stillness and the dimmed light sat before the altar of the Master, plunged in deep meditation. It was the day on which he, also, passed through death into the Nirvikalpa Samādhi, never to return.

To continue the story however: When Noren had meditated some length of time he entered into Samādhi and

was lost to all outer consciousness. A deep dream-like peace stole over him. He was now in the same state of transcendent blessedness as that which had come to him on Sri Ramakrishna's touching his heart, in Jadu Mullick's garden, and also in the room at Dakshineswar, in the earlier days of his meeting the Master. On the second occasion he had not feared as he did in his first experience, and for one month after he was full of ecstasy. But then the Master was in firm health; now he was on the eve of death. When Noren returned to sense consciousness he saw Sri Ramakrishna in tears. He seemed utterly broken. Noren queried anxiously as to what was the reason of this great and sudden sadness. Sri Ramakrishna gave as answer, "O my Noren! My Noren! Now I am really a Fakir, a penniless beggar, having given away my very all and everything to you! By the force of this power, this *Sakti*, transmitted by me to you great things will be done by you in this world; and after that only will you go back!" Noren burst into tears. He was overcome with emotion. He wept as a child. What had the Master done! From what he had said it was certain now that he had given away everything,—all his power, all his realisation, all his insight, all his personality,—to him! Aye, the moment had come when the personality the *Bhagavân* had worn as a garment for the teaching of the spiritual life would be completely merged in the Infinite Reality of Brahma-Nirvana, and the *spirit* of the Modern Gospel of the Sanatan Dharma, be made manifest through his chief disciple.

O for knowing the full meaning and the full happenings of that momentous event when the Master became a beggar and Noren the sudden possessor of all the wealth of the personality of his *Guru*, acquired by him during years upon years of super-human effort and at the cost of terrible austerities! That which had been the *Power* in him, he wilfully deprived himself of in order that Noren might be endowed with spiritual omnipotence. That which he had called "Kali" or "Mother" now left the body of Sri Ramakrishna in the depths of that meditation, and transferred Itself into the disciple's

personality, which had been trained for this great occurrence by innumerable hours of spiritual devotion and spiritual exercise. In reality, however, the Master knew from the great sense of emptiness and poverty which had come upon him, that it meant the uttermost giving-up of his own body and personality. What was now left of his suffering human consciousness would soon be blown out by the Winds of the Consciousness of Brahman. To all other intents and purposes, Ramakrishna became merged in That which was to be made manifest as the Power of the future Swami Vivekananda ; the *Guru* became the disciple, when that which was Ramakrishna had completed its task in its human incarnation and manifestation. It abandoned itself wholly and entirely for the good of the world. It gave itself, as one gives a flower or bestows a gift, to Noren for the good of the world. This was the Height and Depth of Love, the very Divinity of Compassion.

The last two days had passed with the increase of sorrow on the part of the disciples. They lived in a presentiment that all would soon be over and they would be left fatherless in the darkness of the world. The Light which lighted their souls would, humanly speaking, be extinguished. They prayed and wept, and wept and prayed. Meanwhile moments of exaltation came which they could not explain. They felt a Presence and Power about them. They would be translated into the very height of an unaccountable superhuman ecstasy, and plunged the next moment into violent grief. The last day passed heavily over their hearts. The night came on. The body of Sri Ramakrishna was in the throes of death, suffering intense pain. The disciples were gathered about him, forlorn and anxious. Towards the middle portion of the night, however, a great, great Peace descended upon all, numbing their anguish of mind, but preparing them also for the moment when they would give way to utmost grief.

And in the night, while they stood about the form of the Master with their countenances wrapt in death-like stillness and seriousness, as revealed by the flickering lamp-light,

the thought flashed across the mind of Noren, "He has said he is Divinity-Incarnate. If he now says in the midst of the throes of death, in this terrible moment of human anguish and physical pain, 'I AM the God Incarnate', then I will believe!" It was but a dare he had ventured to make in the inmost recesses of his own mind, without thinking for one single moment as to the results. Suddenly the Master turned towards him and summoning all his energy, said, "O my Noren, are you not yet convinced! He who was Rama and Krishna, is now Ramakrishna in this body,—not, however, from the standpoint of your Vedanta, but literally so!" Thus Sri Ramakrishna conveyed to the disciples in a most momentous hour the great truth that the personalities of all those Incarnations who have given out the highest Divine Consciousness to humanity are the same Personality, revealing Itself variously, under different names and different human forms according to the needs of the time, nay more, that He Himself was the same Personality. If lightning had suddenly flashed into the room Noren could not have been more dumbfounded in his wonder at this last utterance of the Master. Qualms of remorse wrung his heart for having doubted even for one moment his Master, and tears coursed down his cheeks.

It was a wonderful night, in very truth. It passed in varying moods of sorrow and exultation. The Master's eyes spoke volumes, though his lips were silent. And at the turning of night, at the very first hour of the breaking of a new day,—Sunday, August the sixteenth, eighteen hundred and eighty-six,—the Master, breathing the most sacred Word of the Vedas, entered Brahma-Nirvanam, passing into the Uttermost Peace. That Word was *OM*—and he became *Tat Sat*—the Boundless Existence of Divinity.

At that moment when the Master passed away, the disciples were overcome with grief, weeping aloud in utter forlornness. The news spread broadcast. Numbers of devotees hurried to the Garden-house at Cossipur. A sense of ineffable and irreparable loss fell upon all those who came. Noren

was stupified. The Master had now gone ! O the love that he had breathed for him, for which the body had been the manifesting instrument ! Noren could not now look upon that dear face without weeping bitterly. Those eyes, which had looked upon him innumerable times with such an incomparable love, were now closed for the last time. Those lips which had spoken innumerable words of love and prophecy for him were now sealed in death. He felt it was more than he could bear. Verily, now he was alone ! A hundred thoughts rushed through his brain. O that he had loved and appreciated him more ! O that he had literally hung upon every word which the Master had ever uttered !

The cot upon which the Master lay was brought down and the body was wrapt in new linen and silk and adorned with flowers. For some time it stood in the grounds of the house at Cossipur. Then it was taken in a long procession to the burning-*ghat* at Baranagore, some distance away. All the disciples and devotees were in tears; all shouldered in turn the beloved burden of the Master's form. Many of the spectators touched the cot with their hands and then touched the hands to their heads, as it passed along. Throughout the whole length of the procession, the names of the Lord rent the air.

At the *ghat* when the pyre had been prepared, the body of the Master was tenderly laid upon it. Finally, the pyre was lighted, the disciples themselves touching it each with a handful of lighted reeds. The garments of the Master were aflame. Incense and spices and clarified butter were poured upon the pyre. Soon the whole was a great mass of fire, shooting forth tongues of white, red, yellow, blue and varicoloured flames. It seemed a Great Radiance Incarnate.

And as the disciples stood about in prayer and sorrow-laden meditation, some fell to the ground, prostrate with grief, while others kneeling touched the ground with their heads in salutation.

As the flames burned brighter and brighter a holy, vast and calming spirit of resignation descended into the utter void of their hearts. Some who had come as spectators,

not having seen the Master during life, were caught up by the vibrant note of radiance of the place. The disciples themselves were suddenly transported from grief. Some, as it were, saw the smiling face of the Master. Others felt his Presence, aye, even his thrilling touch. Others again, intensely absorbed, saw their Beloved in the lotus of their heart, illumining the inmost recesses of their soul. A great illumination descended upon all. Bereavement became ecstasy. Was not he, their Lord, the Soul of their souls, even the same, in life or on the other side of the Veil? The disciples rose on the wings of a great celestial power into the same condition of blessedness which they had so often experienced in the presence of the Master while he was in the body. When the flames reached the highest pitch of intensity, and the burning-*ghat* was a great sheet of raging light, the souls of all the disciples were swept, as it were, by floods of religious exaltation, because of the thought that they had been blessed with the unworldly love of their Lord, which had made their souls free even in the midst of the world. Power and glory came to them, and the Light and the Spirit of the Highest Consciousness. And the air was rent with the name of the *Bhagavân*, whose form had now been consumed by the devouring flames, and whose Spirit had soared into the Omnipresence of the Divine Nature.

Noren stood in their midst, his mind filled with varying thoughts. He was silent; his hearing caught the great notes of triumph that resounded around him, "Jay Ramakrishna!" "Jay Ramakrishna!" "Jay Gurudevaki Jay!" Aye, he, too, was caught up in the Great Vision of Power and Glory and in the same Sublime Exaltation of sense and thought and soul, until a spiritual climax was reached and a Great Pentecostal Power and Fire descended upon all—which was the Spirit of the Master!

Hari ! Om Tat Sat !

THE END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

PRINTER'S ERRORS.

PAGE	LINE	FOR	READ
7	21	deep	deep,
10		of the river, the water,	the water of the river,
21	20	spiritual	spiritual
38	18	crowining	crowning
50	9	closed	and had closed
58	19	cresecent	crescent
62	1	wonderfull	the wonderful
66	31	wœ	woe
80	3	certain	to certain
80	35	and less	regardless
95	36	upon	at
107	2	first	First
124	30	eighteen	eighteenth
137	15	himself, with anger	himself with anger,
158	13	belived	believed
158	15	selfawakening	self-awakening
159	4	senseof	sense of
189	8	Eternal.	Eternal
221	12	Suprme	Supreme
222	15	glorious many other	many other glorious
239	5	complmentary	complementary
241	25	amonist	a monist
248	15	throughly	thoroughly
251	23	Kaii	Kâli
253	3	ten-timesterrible	ten-times terrible
253	31	devont	devout
263	14	passing	a passing
287	1	stavation	starvation
317	4	sed	leased
319	5	words	words and
381	27	the consciousness	of the consciousness
381	28	of expand	expand
383	23	Sir	Sri
384	4	a Man	Man
417	5	bya	by a
418	30	Then	However
432	9	even	ever

Recd. on 31.12.2002



291.64/VIV



